

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 213 DECEMBER 2009

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

We've got the scoop on
CA's new Total War!

BRINK

Splash Damage's stunning
shooter blows us away!

WIN!
TINY COMPO

Sera is the setting for
Optiush 2, but what is
it also known as?

CHAMPIONS ONLINE

Final verdict on
Cryptic's crime-fighting
superhero MMO!

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OPERATION

FLASHPOINT

DRAGON RISING

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Closing date: 6 Nov, 2009.
Full offer details on page 42.

Meet The Team

This page is meant to be funny

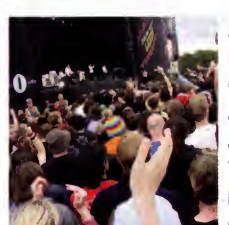


STEVE HOGARTY
Deputy editor
AGE 22
LIKES 21
DISLIKES 23
FEARS Ketchup
FAVOURITE GAME *Frontier: Elite II*
NOW PLAYING *Section 8*

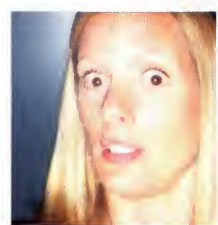
This month Steve flew out to Cologne to touch and smell as many new games as possible. He then returned to the PC ZONE hive to relay information in the language of bees. By rhythmically wagging his abdomen, scurrying in circles and buzzing at varying frequencies, he told us all about the things he had seen, and roughly what score he reckoned they'd get. Interestingly enough, physics dictate that Steve's legs aren't strong enough to support his body weight – yet they do.



NICK BRAKESPEAR
Labourer
Returning for another dose of slavery, we left Nick to put this issue together while we went to the pub.
NOW PLAYING: *World of Warcraft*



ADAM GLICK
Regular freelancer
Glick ran off to Reading and Leeds, and returned to us with tinnitus, a vacant expression, a bag full of "medicine", and in need of a shower.
NOW PLAYING: *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood*



ALI WOOD
Editor
Now a countryside gal, Ali travels to work with a pack of baying foxhounds in tow to annoy her fellow train-bound commuters.
NOW PLAYING: *Batman: Arkham Asylum*



DAVID BROWN
Staff writer
Hobbled due to a mystery back and leg pain, David soldiered on. Until he found he was barred from his local GP. So he decided to consume more opiates than Hugh Grant.
NOW PLAYING: *OpFlash 2*



PAUL PRESLEY
Veteran Zoner
Prezzer refused to wear tights and a cape while playing *Champions Online*, yet he always donned a smart gorilla suit and tuxedo when working. Weirdo.
NOW PLAYING: *Cities XL*



PHIL WAND
Hardware editor
Wandy's missus found him curled into a ball, gibbering quietly. He only recovered when Gmail came back online.
NOW PLAYING: *Counter-Strike (of course)*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... work experience chaps making repeat appearances, long weekends.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... sciatica, developers unable to release games on time, long weekends.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

- A QUIET XMAS?** 13mins With all the delays in games, few could be out in December.
- JUST GO AWAY. NOW...** 2mins Andre and Jordan divorce. Can we stop being force-fed their lives now?
- NO MORE BIG BROTHER** 1mins We cheered at the news.
- NEVER AGAIN** 31mins Steve swears off building PCs after his explodes a second time.
- THE SACRILEGE** 7mins *The Beatles: Rock Band*? Lennon would not have approved...
- THE GREED** 7mins Well, it's not like McCartney, Starr and Yoko need the money...
- THE HORROR** 5mins And it means more mangled *Hey Jude*s are coming to your living rooms.
- "IT DID WHAT!?"** 11mins Richard pulled ivy off a wall, which promptly collapsed a couple of days later.
- MONOPOLY CITY STREETS** 6mins *Monopoly* played using *Google Maps*? That's just daft.
- POO GIRL** 3min Moral: never reach into a festival's chemical loo.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER TINY COMPO: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to tf@tiny.com or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to: Tiny Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Bulwer Street, London NW1 6AW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a copy of *Empire: Total War*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before 27 October 2009 will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility can't be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK, employees of Future or its affiliates, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. 9. Entrants must be 18 years or over. Full conditions: tinyurl.com/futurets



PCZONE

Contents

In this issue of the UK's
best PC mag...

IN THE ARMY NOW

TO GET THE first review of
a game as eagerly awaited
as *Operation Flashpoint:*

Dragon Rising we had to prove
ourselves worthy as reviewers,
dodging bullets, gunning down
enemies and driving tanks.

Of course, publishers' budgets
ain't what they used to be (we didn't
even get to go paintballing which I
am ever so good at: stealth is key) so
we only did these challenges in our
minds, mentally preparing for the
moment we got our hands on
OpFlash 2. Still, it was all worth it as
you will see when you read the review
on page 56.

Codemasters are on a bit of a roll
at the moment what with this and, if
rumours are to be believed, the PC
version of *DiRT 2* is going to be
amazing, particularly as it's the first
game with DirectX 11 capabilities.

And Pavel is back with a *Special
Report* this month on DX 11 (page 14)
to see what all the fuss about.

While I've got you, I thought I
would share a little piece of exciting
information in that we're going up by
16 pages as of the next issue! And
what will we be filling those pages
with, I hear you cry? I don't want to
spoil the surprise, but one titbit of
information I will share is that Steve
Hill's *NeverQuest* will be back! It was
one of my favourite parts of the mag
prior to joining and I was a bit miffed
when it was dropped, so it makes
sense to bring it back. Even if that
now makes me sound a bit selfish...

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

PC ZONE heads out to war. Join us
and find out how much fun it can be

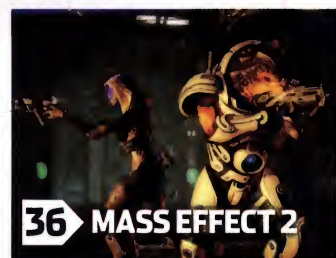


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Take on the role of the might midget
general, in the expansion for *Empire*.



30 BRINK



36 MASS EFFECT 2



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PCZONE



And get Norton
AntiVirus Gaming
Edition! See page 42





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BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

The Bat's back and the Joker's gone wild... again. Take a look at the definitive superhero game.

100
ONLINE ZONE
FIGHT CLUB!
ZONE CHAT!
RANTING!
BLOGS!

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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



56 OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

Too busy? PC ZONE in 65 words...
This month we have *Brink* (lovin' it), *The Old Republic* (lovin' it), *Napoleon: Total War* (lovin' it), *Mass Effect 2* (lovin' it), *StarCraft II* (lovin' it), *Diablo III* (lovin' it), *WOW: Cataclysm* (lovin' it), *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising* (lovin' it), *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (lovin' it), and *NFS: Shift* (lovin' it), making this issue a bigger love-in than a hippy commune based in a Viagra factory.

94 FREEWARE

We play multiple games, race French trucks, chat up lots of women, beat up lots of men, and go all Commie.

Letters

Having moved house *Ali Wood's* post is being redirected



KING OF LETTERS

QUEST FOR FAME

In my quest to get in your magazine, I've sent a couple of pictures.

The first is the view of Tenerife from my hotel balcony. You may wonder why the magazine remains wrapped in the photo. Well, due to having only hours to pack for my flight I forgot one essential: my latest subscribed copy of *PC ZONE*! It'd only just arrived and I was gagging for some more *PCZ* goodness, not to mention the need to have a holiday snap with my much-loved periodical. Despite searching Gatwick Airport high and low, only the previous month's issue was available. Damn the cost I said, I want in the mag.

The second image I've attached is from my return home with my original September issue, the Gatwick one and the forgotten October mag. As you can see from the photo I opened the newly bought copy and read it again. It kept getting better every time I read it!

king_clueless



Well *king_clueless*, this really shows dedication and that's what I like!

When I go on holiday I always end up in WHSmiths buying armfuls of magazines, there's nothing better than relaxing in the sun with your

favourite read, and a tall, ice-cold drink full of alcohol.

Plus with a surname like King, there could only be one King Of Letters this month. Well done you. Enjoy your prize.

WIN!



If you're picked as King of Letters you will get a brand-new ASUS EN9600GT Silent graphics card, worth around £100. This variant on the NVIDIA GeForce card packs ASUS's V-cool Heatsink, which keeps the card running 10° cooler than a standard model. Less heat, means less fans, which means less noise, which means better gaming.

NICE ONE

Just a quick message to say thanks for the new subscription ads (issue 211) utilising a large pair of ladies breasts to grab attention. A return to scantily clad models gripping joysticks with confused

looks on the cover and ads for smut in the back pages next please!

David

With hindsight, I think it was possibly a step too far. If I could I would apologise for causing any distress, but if I did that would be admitting responsibility. And that I actually care about this.

THE ODD MAN OUT

Did you mean to give the answer to *Spot The Odd Man Out* (page 109) on the next page in your *Empire: Total War Developer's Commentary* in issue 211? If not, then it's the dude in the red and can I claim my prize.

Z

We don't like to make our questions too difficult for you, so thought we'd make this one more than a little too obvious.

NOOBTUBE

Noobs in *World of Warcraft* are derided at least on my server. I think what Sean (Cry Noob, *Letters*, issue 212) is referring to is a newbie, who's a new player who doesn't know much about the game. They're generally welcome and people advise them on how to play.

A noob is someone who thinks they can play but can't and refuses to listen to advice on the matter, behaviour such as spamming trade chat, begging for money, begging for a boost and ninja looting are common signs of a noob.

There are also more specialised words for bad players such as Hunter and Death Knobb, being stereotypes for Hunters and Death Knights often applied to everyone of that class just based on the classes' reputations and not the player themselves.

I know that not all players are like this and, I understand Sean's point in his



We're still certain this guy shouldn't be there.

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The Duke Nukem cast.
Now unemployed.



letter but there are arseholes playing *World of Warcraft* as well as FPSs. I can't comment on any FPSs as I haven't played one online since *Quake 3*. God that makes me feel old!

Stewart Brough

I clearly answered Sean's letter last month in the midst of a bit of a strop so neglected the true meaning of it.

Online gaming is just like any area you live in, there are always the bad parts, featuring unsavoury characters and people you'd rather avoid. We could give them MMOASBO. See what I did there?

TIME NEVER WAITS

I realised two things when I read the article *Miller's Crossing* in issue 211. The text: "We dropped the ball: we should be on *Duke Nukem 6* by now," make me think of all the poor to crap sequels that exist out in the gaming industry.

Maybe sometimes a game company should release a game while it's partially buggy or when it is obvious that the story is poor or that it is merely a rehash of previous games.

Maybe if 3D Realms did release a crap *Duke Nukem*, they would have had kept up momentum to release another version, then another and today we might in fact be at a brilliant *Duke Nukem 6*.

People are complaining about the fact *Left For Dead 2* is coming out already. Maybe with what I have written in mind, it is not such a bad thing to get good games in quick succession.

Second, it'd be brilliant if you had a few articles on the leading members in the gaming industry. I think it would be great for the reader to have an accurate biography of the big fish in the industry.

BTW, your mag is the best thing on paper, love *How To Make A Game* too.

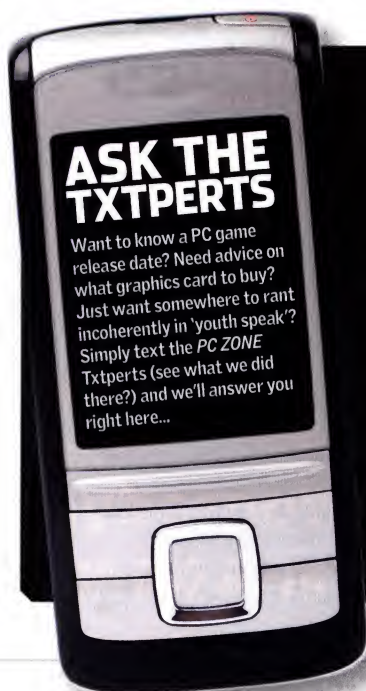
Donal HammerHead

Crikey. I think you're a bit mad. Can you imagine the potential damage to a developer's reputation if they released a substandard game just to get it out? Imagine the cries of people being ripped off or feeling cheated. Unless it was priced fairly, it just wouldn't work.

As for your second point, that proves you're not so mad. It just so happens that we will be increasing our page count by 16 next month, and this is one



Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Is *Batman* really that good?
Dorothy

Read our review on page 62, but I can tell you now that we rather liked it.

Wot no subs tits this month?
Wendy

No. And probably never again.

that chick on p33 is hot!
Deborah

She's not real, you know. Any of them.

Confused why there is a *PC Gamer* ad in latest issue stating "World's Best PC Game Mag". Are you Universe's Best?
GilesBWard

Not just the universe – in every dimension.



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➤ idea for a series we've been bandying around for some time. But as for what else is coming... that's going to be a pleasant surprise.

PEOPLE FINDER

In the late nineties/early noughties I understand Paul Ditta wrote some pieces for *PC ZONE*. However Google isn't turning up any results for him that aren't dated around that period.

Do you have any idea what happened to him or have any of his contact details on file?

Adam McGregor

Ah yes, Mr Ditta. Actually I can't say I've ever heard of him but I did find this on CVG: snipurl.com/rpgc1 After doing my own bit of detective work, I believe he's now working in the police force. But sadly we can't give out any contact details.

PHOTO FINISH

Firstly, can I say what a good job you have been doing since taking up the mantle of editor. I have been reading *PC ZONE* for over 10 years now and it still feels as fresh today as back then.

In your last issue (211) I noticed that you reused one of my photos that I sent in a little over a year ago. The photo was of a load of cover discs in a spiral. Can I just say thanks for using it again and I was wondering if it qualified me for receiving a prize?

Anyway, thanks for your time and I hope the magazine is as good fun to make as it is to read.

David



PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD

Russell Baldwin
Where? Mount Pilatus,
Switzerland
Camera Locked!

We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



"As for what else is coming... that's going to be a pleasant surprise"

Now then. As you know I don't like to take responsibility for things that aren't my fault, but as editor of the mag the buck stops at me, so this time you can blame me. I've sent you something in the post to make up for our cheek.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

I am an avid gamer, I reside in California and would like to subscribe to your magazine. I have found it a fresh change from its American counterparts. Does your magazine offer back issues? I just recently stumbled on it, and I missed out on most of 2009.

Kevin

Unfortunately back issues are only available to people who live in the UK and Europe.

However, if you want to subscribe rates at time of writing were \$135.43 for a year's subscription (that's 13 issues!). Or you could just move.

ONLY ME, AGAIN!

I can safely say that I never actually thought you'd print my last email (Drop the DVD?, issue 211), so thank you for that. It has safely established me as the geekiest of my friends, something that has been argued over since our university days.

I just thought that following your point that shops should not legally sell your magazine to 13-year-olds, it would help *PC ZONE* to increase its revenues during this challenging financial period through one simple action.

If *PCZ* were to offer a version that didn't carry a DVD on the cover then you wouldn't have a requirement to submit to the BBFC's rating system. All of these poor 13-year-olds who currently aren't allowed to buy the excellent *PCZ* would find an entirely new magazine opened up to them, allowing them to progress on from the *Beano* and game reviews in the Sunday supplements.

Of course, it would also swell your coffers a bit.

Jon Hawkins

Hello again, Jon. Your mates are going to think you're even geekier now. You do know that's a compliment, right? Geek = expert, in my opinion anyway.

So, in answer to your email, not including the disc is not a bad idea, theoretically, but I'm not sure whether there would be a problem with the actual content in the magazine. As in, whether we'd have to be careful about what we print language and image-wise, and we'd rather be considered an adult mag, for adults, right? Plus, I don't think the suits think that taking the disc off and charging less is good commercial practice (yawn).

Still, my vision for *PC ZONE* is not merely print-based, but how far off realising other ambitions – such as some kind of online resource that reaches beyond the blog and forum – is anyone's guess. **PCZ**



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
DECADE-OLD MAILBAG,
ANSWERED TODAY

BAD INFLUENCE

Drinking and gambling in one issue? I don't consider myself a prude but I'd imagine a lot of young people read your magazine and I think it's wholly irresponsible to glamorise activities that can lead to addiction and ruin.

Saying that, I took your advice and had a few pints before challenging my mates to a game of *Counter-Strike* for cash. I won and am now considerably better off than I was before I read *PC ZONE*, although I'm thinking of going down the bookies after I've written this and betting all my money on a no-hoper.

You see what you've started?

Simon Langhorn

My finding a suspicious, short, dark hair within the pages of the mag I took this letter from, (all the way from November 2003), rendered me unable to reply properly. Sorry about that.



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COVER STORY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

The Chinese are coming to a fictional Sino-Pacific island near you. So get your M16s ready for our review...

You are to provide anti-tank cover to Dagger One (de
Seven APCs in the area around the airfield, current



elements moving on the airfield. Latest intel places Type Niner
at positions unknown.



MOST GAMES THAT involve walking about in knee-high grass wearing camouflaged clothing are about as exciting as watching Stoke City. Lots of slogging through open countryside, followed by a gunshot and a "You are dead" screen. Ruthless, efficient and damn frustrating. *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising* aims to change that, without turning the genre into an auto-aim-infested pad-wielding arse-fest. Is it possible to infuse the military simulator genre with arcade sensibilities? Can Codemasters succeed in providing a realistic war experience without alienating players with an incredible number of bugs and exploding COs? Turn to the page indicated to find out...

PAGE

56

**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

THE SIMS 3: HOOLIGANS

THIS ISSUE SEES us share all the glorious content from GamesCom, this year held in Cologne. Steve ran around the colossal exhibition centre trying to make all his appointments so we could bring you the latest on the likes of *Brink*, *Mass Effect 2* and *The Old Republic*, along with all the Blizzard stuff announced at Blizzcon (they had a special event on the Blizzard booth on the Friday night to ensure those at GamesCom could watch the opening ceremony).

And just a word of warning. I'm going to Stockholm later this month to see the first of *The Sims 3* expansion packs. You'll remember I really liked *The Sims 3* (sorry!), but I'm well aware the history the expansion packs have within this esteemed publication. EA still haven't made any moves to create the expansion pack I want, that allows you to play on a *Shameless*-style council estate, enjoying cheap pints down the pub and pie and mash for dinner (mmm!). But I'm going to reiterate to them this is the direction they should take going forward with the franchise.

You could even include a trip to a West Ham vs Millwall football match, choosing a side and your weapon of choice, and whether or not to invade the pitch, or save your violence for down the pub and the Tube ride home. Just an idea.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood

Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

They love each other really.



Dreadnought smash!



DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING

Chaos is coming back into fashion

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com ETA 2010

DAWN OF WAR II divided the fans when first it crashed down onto our hard drives, flexing its power armour-clad muscles and ranting about The Warp. The new gameplay and the exclusion of everybody's favourite nutcases, the Chaos Space Marines, turned many people off, as did the inclusion of *Games For Windows LIVE*. Nevertheless, Relic have decided to give the fans some of what they wanted with *DOW2*'s first expansion, *Chaos Rising*.

Boasting a new and improved campaign that addresses *DOW2*'s issues of map repetition and limited battlefield objectives, *Chaos Rising* picks up where *DOW2* left off, allowing your xenophobic genetically-engineered super soldiers to become even more super. This means a higher level cap, new combat abilities and lots

of shiny new toys for your troops to play with.

A lot of attention has been given to the depth of the campaign too. Top of the list of new features is 'corruption', a new story and gameplay mechanic that ties in to the corrupting influence of Chaos.

Throughout the campaign, the player will be faced with moral choices, such as whether to risk destroying a sacred building during a battle. Going against the principles and ideology of your Blood Ravens chapter will add to your corruption level. The bad news is this will turn you to the dark side of The Warp, but the good is you may unlock new Chaos-like powers or war gear.

Like all true evil, however, such powerful abilities and equipment are paid for dearly, with an ability that increases your damage, for example, draining your health at the same time.

DOW2's story promises to get a little more interesting, with the return of Eliphaz (the leader of the Chaos forces in *Dawn of War: Dark Crusade*) and an increase in communication between such characters and you.

If all of this wasn't enough, the maps are receiving some love too, with a wider variety of battlefields and the arrival of, in the words of Relic, "catastrophic destructive events" later on in the story. An attempt to outshine *StarCraft II*'s rising lava perhaps?

Like the original *Dawn of War*'s *Dark Crusade* expansion, *Chaos Rising* will be playable standalone, and those who own the core game will be able to access the new Chaos faction when in multiplayer.

With all these fixes, features and a new faction, Relic look set to repeat their history of delivering solid *Dawn of War* expansions. **PCZ**

STOP PRESS!

RELIGIOUS

ZeniMax have acquired the rights to *Prey*. Could this mean a sequel is on the horizon? Or are ZeniMax just hoarding franchises now?

HOLY DLC, BATMAN

Free stuff is already on its way for *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, and should be there by the time you read this. Which should be now, you villain.

I OWN YOUR HOUSE

Google and Hasbro have created *Monopoly City Streets*; a version of the game that uses *Google Maps*. How long before people start trading virtual property for real cash?

30

BRINK

Wide shoulders, small heads, good game?



38

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

The French invade. Seriously, they had a good army once.



52

WOW: CATAclysm

Swap your soul for shiny new expansion.



"Blood for the Blood God! 99p! Every little bit helps!"

"Chaos Rising picks up where Dawn of War II left off"

We apologise for the bare demon bum.

**STUFF**

Hot on the heels of ZeniMax's acquisition of id and all the cross-franchise fantasies that entailed, Disney are getting in on the action too. Not content with acquiring Marvel Entertainment and Warren Spector, their latest bid for domination has landed them Bungie co-founder Alex Seropian. Rumours of Mickey Mouse speeding around New York in a Warthog fighting crime, and uncovering an intricate conspiracy that leads to difficult moral choices, while struggling to keep his true identity hidden and teabagging his opponents, are, as you'd expect, unconfirmed.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES



Steve goes to Cologne and does many debauched things that are not fit to print. Sausages may or may not have been involved.



OpFlash: Dragon Rising arrives, completes its objectives coldly and efficiently, and earns a medal or two.

ON THE FENCE



Dave spends so much time playing Batman that he gets a bit addled, thinks he's a superhero and does something unfortunate to his back.

BAD TIMES



Nick arrives fresh-faced and eager to work, only to discover that nobody is in the office. Much sulking ensues.



Reviews are repeatedly held up by an inexplicable tendency for technology to hate its human masters.

IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

DIRECT ACTION

After fumbling DirectX 10, Microsoft promises *Pavel Barter* a new start

AS FAR AS launches go, DirectX 10 was up there with the Titanic. In late November, 2006, Microsoft's graphics processor hit the market. Six months later and the amount of games shipped using the tech was zero. A few limped ahead in 2007 – *Company of Heroes*, *Call of Juarez*, *Lost Planet* – but the damage had already been done, especially for those who'd invested in a then costly GeForce 8600. Then, in November, 2007, Microsoft's tanker hit an iceberg: *Crysis* was touted for DX10, only to run equally well in DX9.

If you were annoyed, think how developers felt. DirectX 10 was Vista exclusive, and Vista was a bumbling hippopotamus arse in its first year. Not only did DX10 cost them engineering work, but it sullied their relationships with publishers. Today, that has all changed. DirectX 11 has yet to launch, and already developers are beavering away on the tech. Announced titles include *Aliens vs Predator*, *DiRT 2*, *Battleforge*, and *Crysis 2*.

"The first game for DX10 arrived seven months afterwards," says Richard Huddy, senior manager of AMD's developer relations. "I reckon six months after DX11, there'll be six to 10 games. Maybe more. That might not sound much, but it's unprecedented. It's faster than any transition in the past."

Anyone burned on DX10's promises might be tutting in the aisles, but there's no doubt that DX11's adoption will be better – significantly so, as DX11 is backwards compatible. Not only will it be packaged with Windows 7, but (now-entrenched) Vista users can avail of its wonders. With a guaranteed install base, developers have wasted no time getting started.

"DirectX 11 allows us to make higher fidelity, better looking games that run at higher resolutions and at the same time run faster. That's a quadruple win," says Chris Kingsley, Rebellion's chief



"We're 50% closer to photo-realism in a significant number of cases"

Richard Huddy, senior manager developer relations, AMD

technical officer behind *AvP*. "We can get more real geometry detail in your face, where we need it, to create a real sense of atmosphere, tension and fear."

BETTER HEADS

With the adoption issues hopefully sorted, developers reckon DX11 will jazz up game graphics. DX11's weapon of choice is the Tessellator, which allows game artists to increase the number of triangles that make up in-game environments and characters. This will tackle rubbish crowd animations and radically improve water effects.

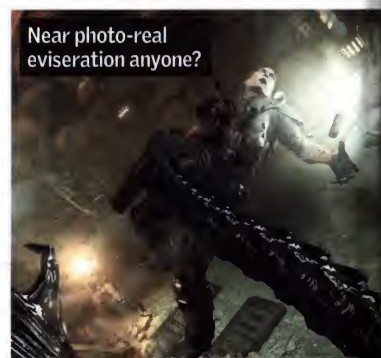
"Crowd animations tend to be fairly approximate these days," says Huddy. "They're compromises because you don't want the artist to spend too much time creating the artwork, and you don't want the rendering of the crowd to be a heavy experience for the graphics chip."

"If you can keep the crowd in the distance, that's OK, but if you want to show a crowd's excitement when a goal is scored, or see them running out of the way when a car comes crashing through a forest, as soon as you take the camera in close the illusion is completely broken."

Over the years, game designers have had to come up with excuses for keeping the camera away from the crowd. Tessellation, according to tech boffins, will allow much-improved replays of crowd scenes and in-crowd POV-cameras. Bryan Marshall, chief technical officer at Codemasters, enthuses about *DiRT 2* for DX11: "Our animated crowds (of up to 100,000 people) will appear much more detailed, enhancing the overall realism. If you crash your car and you see individuals up close, which shows how much work needs to go into making a really lively and engrossing environment."

In titles like *BioShock*, you can almost dunk apples in the digital sea, but waves still look rubbish when they lap up against the beach, as the buffering effects standing out like a sore thumb.

Near photo-real
viserisation anyone?



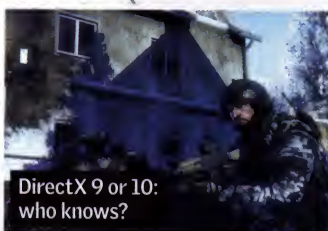
Those crowds are
set for an upgrade.



Modern Warfare 2 could be a new start for DirectX.



3D prettiness.



DirectX 9 or 10: who knows?

Tessellation can reportedly fix that by throwing in loads more polygons to create refined ripples. "This looks cool as the ripples have greater geometric depth than before," says Marshall.

Another holy grail of game graphics is photo-real light and shading. DX11 brings Compute Shader 5.0 to the table. Like the wave effects, this will refine the areas in which shadow and light meet. *DIRT 2*'s developers have used the effect to pick out small areas of highlights on the rally cars. In *Aliens vs Predator*, lighting and shadows are not only key to the visuals, but they have a real effect on gameplay.

"For example, AI Aliens seek out and hide in shadows and dark areas just waiting to pounce on unsuspecting player Marines," says Kingsley. "Marine players can throw flares out, and these illuminate the environment brightly but they also cast even more shadows giving Aliens more places to hide. Players will be literally jumping at shadows.

"Of course, when you are playing the Alien the roles are reversed and you'll want to use the darkness to the best

advantage. To enable all of this, we've used an advanced high dynamic range lighting system where we've given Marines, Aliens and Predators different brightness ranges, so the Alien can see better in the dark but less well in bright external lighting."

A STEP CLOSER

Microsoft are even saying DX11 will take graphics closer to photorealism: "It's very clear it's a pretty big step," says Richard Huddy from AMD. "We're not going to get to the stage where everything becomes photo-real, but we're probably making a 50% jump in terms of the capabilities – 50% closer to photo-realism in a significant number of cases."

DirectX 11 is also set to improve frame rates. DirectX 9 and DX10 both channelled graphics through one CPU core, which often caused a bottleneck of rendering loads. But with DX11's Multi-Threading tech, all four cores can distribute graphics.

For developers, this makes life a lot easier. The whole tech, in fact, seems

LOOK OF LOVE

The steps that have lead to DirectX 11

DIRECTX 8 (2000)

A small step for man, a large step for gameskind. Although DirectX 7 was launched only a year previously, Microsoft's first graphics interface for the millennium was a huge advance. DirectX 8 allowed developers to create more textures than a carpet shop, and use detailed props – dynamically placed grass and rocks, for example – to flesh out environments. Bump-mapping and better shade effects took PC gaming from the largely blocky nonsense of the '90s, to something far more sumptuous.



DIRECTX 9 (2002)

Water and shadows are the stuff ghouls eat for their breakfast, but that's the stuff that gives the rest of us a gaming experience that resembles something close to reality. DirectX 9 upped the ante for game effects with its Shader Model 2.0, which softly-rendered shadows and dispersed light like whiskey at an Irish wake. The result was characters, weaponry and scenery embedded more efficiently into the world of games like *Half-Life 2*. DirectX9 also delivered DirectSound, which let sound effects chew into your earhole like a Polynesian dung beetle.



DIRECTX 10 (2006)

This version had the slowest adoption rate of any DirectX iteration yet released, despite its much-improved 3D graphics rendering capabilities, spanking new visual effects, and more visual details per frame. Microsoft's biggest boo-boo was to make the tech *Vista*-exclusive, which had millions of XP owners howling in fury. Games were eventually released for DirectX 10 – amongst them *BioShock*, *Tom Clancy's HAWX*, *Crysis* and *Assassin's Creed* – but the damage had been done.



built as an apology to developers for the bungling oafishness of DX10's release. Johan Anderson, lead engineer for the *Battlefield* games, says his studio ported their DX10 code to DX11 in half an hour.

For PC gamers, the horizon is much brighter, and more graphically sumptuous, than it was a few years ago. And although AMD are launching DX11 hardware – followed shortly afterwards, in all likelihood, by NVIDIA cards – there's no immediate rush to buy it, since you'll get DX11 benefits from *Windows 7*.

Developers might not be completely home free though – they'll have to maintain DX9 versions of their games for XP owners, after all – but after the

palaver of DX10 they at least have a technology they can work with and an audience that is ready to play their new games.

"Developers have been hugely positive about this move," says Huddy. "It comes down to the fact that, this time, Microsoft have invested enough upfront in DX11's launch." **PCZ**

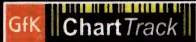
Is there anything you want PC ZONE to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

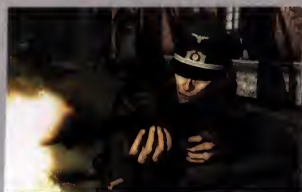
✉ Special Report, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by



- 1 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 2 **NEW CHAMPIONS ONLINE**
N/A
- 3 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 4 **NEW WOLFENSTEIN**
Issue 213 - 69%
- 5 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 6 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 7 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 8 **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 9 **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 - 89%
- 10 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 11 **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 12 **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 13 **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 14 **ARMA II**
Issue 209 - 70%
- 15 **SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES**
N/A
- 16 **NEW COMPANY OF HEROES: ANTHOLOGY**
N/A
- 17 **NEW FARMING SIMULATOR 2009**
Issue 213 - 21%
- 18 **NEW INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 09: ASHES**
N/A
- 19 **LEFT 4 DEAD**
Issue 202 - 93%
- 20 **NEW EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR GOLD**
N/A



4. WOLFENSTEIN

This let-down of a shooter has charted high. It could have been much, much more than it turned out.



17. FARMING SIMULATOR 2009

This charting is more evidence that no-one listens to we critics.



14. ARMA II

Buggy, yet utterly realistic soldiering. Less of a game, and more of an army training aid.



20. EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR GOLD

What does this have the original doesn't? More Polish roads! Yippee!



THE FUNFAIR'S IN TOWN

Clowns and jockeys come to *L4D2*

WEBSITE l4d.com


THIS MONTH SAW the unveiling of the Dark Carnival campaign for *Left 4 Dead 2*. Featuring a carnival with lighting problems and a fair few zombies, *L4D2*'s new diversity of regular infected means that there will be zombie clowns. No word yet on whether or not there'll be a hall of mirrors, but fairgrounds are always fun (if not original in horror games).

To add to the list of new special infected, the jockey has been revealed too; a deranged, gibbering mutant that leaps onto survivors' backs and rides them around, strangling them in the process. Kinky, and potentially hilarious in a Versus match.

Meanwhile in other *L4D2* news, two of the most vocal members of the boycotting brigade appear to have been seduced by Gabe Newell, the sexy beast.

Flying them all the way out to Seattle and putting them up in a hotel, they were shown the new game in all its apocalyptic glory and couldn't help but swoon as Gabe whispered sweet nothings about zombie clowns and cricket bats.





Oh well, some other time maybe.

STICKY TIME PROBLEMS

It's not just watches that stop

WEBSITE singularity-game.com

TIME TRAVEL CAN be fun, educational, confusing or outright creepy depending on which film you're using as the basis for your temporal ponderings. We'd recommend *Primer* for the confusing/creepy combination, but if you're not up for the paradoxical permutations of such a technology, then you can always use the *Bill & Ted* movies instead.

Time travel in games has been done before, to varying degrees of success, and it has become apparent to us discerning gamers that it can be a very hard thing to do right. More often than not, time travel can become little more than a glorified bullet-time button, and there have certainly been concerns over *Singularity* joining this category. Perhaps such cynicism is unwarranted though, as recent footage does shed light on a potentially tasty feature of the time-warping island.

Referred to as the "null zone", the player will occasionally find himself

wandering through an eerie blue realm suspended between time, where those who died in the cataclysmic accident exist as wraiths, repeating their final moments into eternity.

Such alternative states of reality are often fantastic plot devices and the perfect excuse to throw in a few scares or unusual gameplay moments, though given that *Wolfenstein* – Raven's other new shooter – included a similar feature, we have to wonder how well they'll pull it off this time, and whether or not we won't simply end up playing through a blue version of the glowing green Veil.

Raven have been very clear on the notion that *Singularity*'s time-shifting antics won't simply follow the trend for VCR-like fast forwarding or rewinding of time, but seeing the player's special gravity glove being used as a glorified gravity gun, the thought does occur that maybe some manual time control wouldn't go amiss.

MYSTERIES REVEALED

Take a peek into *The Secret World*

WEBSITE www.darkdaysarecoming.com

FUNCOM ARE CERTAINLY optimistic, you have to give them that much. Even with *Age of Conan*'s troubled childhood still fresh in our minds, here they go again with something similarly ambitious.

The Secret World takes the MMO to modern day Earth, except one where conspiracy theories and supernatural phenomenon are real. Vampires, werewolves, demonic cults and powerful secret societies vie for power across various real-world locations such as London, Seoul and New York.

"The potential is there, pandering as it does to every goth's fantasy"

The potential is there, pandering as it does to every goth's fantasy of strolling into secret nightclubs and flirting with the living dead, or of becoming a Blade-like hunter of things that go bump in the night.

On the PvP front, *The Secret World* sounds promising, with three major secret societies to join (The Templars, The Illuminati, and The Dragon) and the ability for players to create and join guild-like cabals. These will have their own secret, customisable bases, and can compete against one another to

collect anima – a magical resource that can be found deep underground.

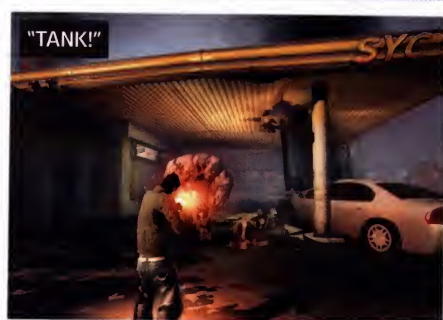
The combat itself promises to be intense and action-packed, with weapons ranging from magical swords and powers to assault rifles and martial arts, and if *Age of Conan* is anything to go by it'll favour the manual approach over macros.

Meanwhile, the game forgoes levels and classes, opting for a freeform approach that should allow for more customisation than the race/class restrictions of genre staples like *World of Warcraft*.

With all of these features, and a setting that has yet to be exploited, *The Secret World* is definitely one to watch.

We're not sure what's going on here, but we doubt it's anything good.

Of course, it might be worth watching it with a little suspicion, given *Age of Conan*'s difficulties and initial lack of high-end content. And further down the road it seems destined to face competition from CCP's upcoming *World of Darkness* MMO, based on White Wolf's paper-and-pencil RPG franchise that has a similar setting.



UNLOCK THE VAULT AT
WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/BORDERLANDS



Bad moon rising.



Wasn't he in Galaxy Quest?



BORDERLANDS

LOCK, LOAD, AND
FACE THE MADNESS!



PLAYSTATION 3

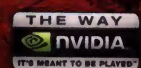


PlayStation Network



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE



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JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

PUTTING**YOUR NECK
ON THE LINE**

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



If you play a lot of games, chances are you've had someone relatively stupid accuse you of distancing yourself from "reality". What reality means, depends on who's saying it.

If it's your mum standing with her hands on her hips, it means "getting some fresh air". If it's your dad it probably means "acquiring vocational skills". If your partner says it, it's most like code for, "We need to address this list of serious failings in our relationship. Not least of which is that you're wearing a headset while I talk to you."

Obviously, reality is subjective – but they were right: as a child, I played games because I liked the peoplelessness of it all. After a gruelling day of enforced socialisation with 300 other children, I thought I'd earned a few hours on my own. I loved the self-contained purity of a world which was left to me by a developer. Learning the rules and survival techniques of a freshly created universe. Most of all, of course, I loved power-ups.

This love is more and more difficult to find. And it's your fault. All of you, out there. Because you're in my house. Watching me play. Standing over my shoulder. These are the worst things about online gaming.

1. STEAM RATINGS

Before *Steam* achievements, this was your only bragging right: a score based solely on how much time you spent playing games. Sure, it's good that even mal-fingered incompetents like myself can score big, simply by leaving *Zuma Deluxe* on overnight. But it's such an embarrassingly unsophisticated system that it makes you resent the whole service.

To boast about your *Steam* Rating is to say "I PLAY MORE GAMES THAN YOU". If you've ever done that, just go to sleep and I'll call you when you can wake up. It's OK, I don't need your number.

2. CO-OPERATION

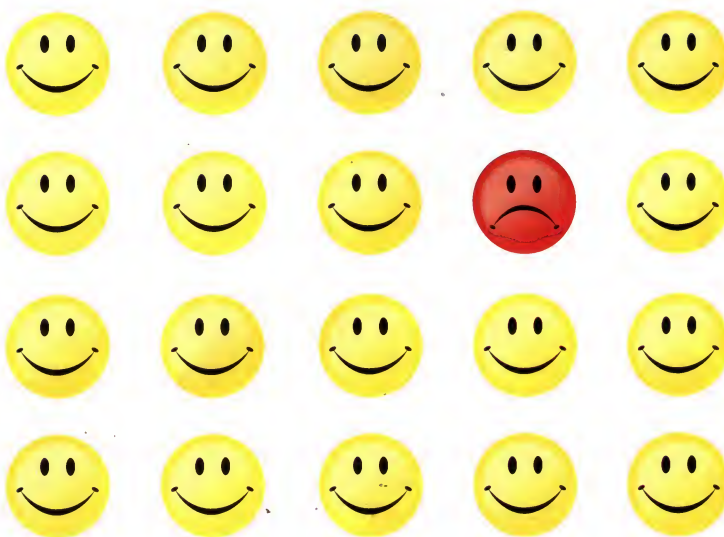
When *Left 4 Dead* was announced, the idea of intimate four-player co-op was a breath of fresh air for nearly everyone. It pricked the bubble that larger battlefields with one greater power of two soldiers on each side was a good thing.

But not for me. A vast, 64 vs 64 battlefield arena is exactly the sort of place where my skills are best concealed. My attempts to disguise my lack of co-ordination and teamwork as the work of a lone wolf who'll run off in the other direction and get sniped silently, and out of view.

With *L4D*, every poor move you make is spot-lit and captioned. I can't even shoot a colleague without my character apologising. Shut up! He doesn't need to know it was me!

3. LEADERBOARDS

I'm not a total curmudgeon. Leaderboards between yourself, and another account you've set up to populate your friend's list, are a great way to spur



"Reality is subjective – but they were right: as a child, I played games because I liked the peoplelessness of it all"

on that competitive edge. Your asynchronous opponent doesn't have to know you stayed up all night to beat their *Trials* score. Your sucking can be buried under days of repetitious slogwork.

But global leaderboards? Madness. They're the point at which you decide to compete with the compulsives, the obsessives, the savants, and the sober. You slide from the unique creature your mother half-heartedly says you are to get you off her leg, into number 63,842. It's a harsh lesson, but a valuable one – even when you try, even when you improve, you're still not very good.

4. CREATIVITY

So, I'm a bad-handed hoover, who can neither butcher nor assist his friends. Surely I can take part in the sandbox creativity of *Second Life* or *Garry's Mod*? That's where the phrase sandbox came from, after all: a children's play pit. And children are notoriously shit at nearly everything.

But have you seen the things they create? Wonderful machines, fuelled by imagination, an understanding of physics, 3D modelling, and more often than not, a profound hatred of Scientology. I attached a balloon to a crate and logged out, terrified of my new position at the bottom of the heap.

Well, if I can't play by myself, I'll just have to have a child. He'll be crap at games for years, and when he starts getting better, I can slam his hand in the car door and say it was an accident. Finally, I'll be a winner. **PCZ**



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JOSEPH KUCAN
KANE, COMMAND & CONQUER

KANE SPEAKS

The leader of NOD deigns to talk to Steve Hogarty

WHILE SEARCHING FOR Tiberium crystals in Cologne, Steve Hogarty was ambushed by NOD forces and brought before their leader. Afraid of Kane's wrath, he risked it anyway to ask actor Joseph Kucan about his role as the charismatic slap-headed mastermind behind *Command & Conquer's* Brotherhood of NOD.

Q How does it feel to reprise the role of Kane in *C&C4*?

A It's a living hell, I don't know why I keep doing this. I'm not paid very well. Usually I just make stuff up as I go along, but this time they made me memorise lines and if I got them wrong they'd hit me with big sticks.

I don't know why I keep doing it. It's really, really unpleasant, and you know I don't think I'm going to do it anymore. I think I'm done. Thank you for making me realise how shallow and horrific my life has been.

It's unique, not only in the genre but in the entire industry. Nobody is doing live action anymore. We were hip and happening in the '90s when we started this nonsense. It's fallen out of favour for whatever reason, but I can't imagine the game continuing without that. I think *Generals* suffered for it.

I've said it all the time: we have the best fans in the world. The people who've been playing the game for a long time, they identify with it. They feel so strongly that they are NOD or they are GDI. They play both sides, but they identify with one side or the other. I don't think that's to do with the units, I think it's to do with the characters who represent the philosophies of the different sides, and I really think it's endemic to the game.

Live action is easy to get wrong isn't it? You can't take it too seriously.

No you can't take it too seriously, but, and I've always said this: there's something very particular and specific

something by yourself is different to the way you react to something as an audience.

What was your favourite scene?

There was a love scene between myself and Natasha Henstridge that was unfortunately cut in the final version, lasting as I recall 12 and a half minutes, and it was cut for time. Specifically in my contract I'm not required to do any nudity, but in Natasha's contract she's required to do nudity in all her work. So I was fully clothed,

and she was bare-ass naked, and we had a very intimate 12 and a half minute love scene. It took us four days to film that 12 minutes. That was my favourite scene.

I have that at home on a private video tape. You might wanna leave that out. That might not actually be true. Libel laws might apply. **PCZ**

"There was a love scene between myself and Natasha Henstridge lasting 12 and a half minutes"

So which C&C actors really get into the role?

In the expansion pack for *C&C3*, Kane's *Wrath*, they brought in Carl Lumbly (Marcus Dixon, *Alias*), I just thought he was fantastic. Whenever I come in to do this role, I'm used to all the other actors being maybe three, maybe four times better than me as actors. But with Carl, Carl is like six to eight times better. That really made an impression. Carl was great, and a lot of fun to work with. He understood the genre, understood what that connection was between, you know, talking right into the camera. A lot of actors hate talking into the camera.

Is part of C&C's popularity down to the live-action cutscenes?

about the performance necessary to act to an audience of just one person, because at the end of the day, theatre actors perform to a 100+ audience, film actors are performing to a world audience, and in this genre you're performing for an audience of one.

I won't say that you can't take it seriously, but I will say that you have to know that when you perform for that guy, you two are both in on it. There's sort of a wink going on saying, "We're having this experience together even though I've been pre-recorded months ago, and you and I are going to go through this together – just the two of us", and I think it's really easy to get wrong. The way you react to





KANE'S FACIAL HAIR

The beard, explained



Anton LeVay:
head Satanist.

"See you're too young to know this: this is not actually a goatee. I'm totally serious here, this is actually called a Van Dyke. In the '50s, this would be a Van Dyke. A goatee would be this without the moustache. Now that's a little '50s terminology. See I'm old enough to remember the '50s because I was born in 1935, but yeah everyone just assumes goatee.

"I dunno when goatees came to represent evil. I think it was all Anton LaVey in the '60s, I think he was bald with a Van Dyke, and he sorta brought that look to the forefront as an evil guy. And that's actually true. Sometimes I make stuff up, but that's actually true."

Steve wasn't frightened of meeting Kane. Really.

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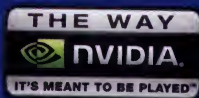
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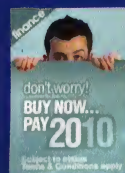
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BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

DEVELOPER EA DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE
badcompany2.ea.com ETA March 2010

YOU MAY CRY OUT, "Bad Company 2? What nonsense is this?" reading the title of this page. "How can there be a *Bad Company 2* when I do not recall a 1?" The answer is that *Bad Company 1* didn't exist for those of us who follow the righteous path of the PC.

Like an unruly teenager, the *Battlefield* series was led astray and found itself lost and confused in the land of the console. However worry not, for the prodigal franchise returns to us, at least in part, with the cross-platform release of *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*.

All that time spent on the wrong side of the tracks has taught it a few dirty new tricks, resulting in a flashier incarnation that draws upon the depths of *Battlefield's* PC heritage, but adds a *Call of Duty*-esque cinematic flair to the proceedings.

With a free-roaming approach to its battles, destructible environments and lots and lots of guns, perhaps the *Battlefield* series' walk on the wild side isn't such a bad thing after all.





THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. GROUND GOES BOOM

Bad Company 2 boasts environments that can be blown to even smaller bits than before. *PC ZONE*, however, does not condone the destruction of the environment, and this man is clearly just a vandal.

2. MOW 'EM DOWN!

Bad Company 2 gives you a choice of 15 different vehicles with which to crash into rocks, teammates and other vehicles. *PC ZONE* does not condone this either, although crashing into things can be very funny.

3. PLAYING WITH WEAPONS

That bloke's gun is one of up to 46 weapons that the player may wield and customise with up to 200 accessories, such as that grenade launcher. *PC ZONE* does not condone the accessorising of weapons, as warfare and fashion should not mix.

4. SMOKED OUT

DICE's Frostbite engine is set to deliver all manner of battlefields, from frosty to sandy, in lovely smoky detail. *PC ZONE* does condone smoke, but not smoking. Smoke is awesome, but smoking isn't. Fire is awesome too, but very dangerous, so if you can try to get smoke without fire, it's definitely for the best.

5. GET 'IM!

This man on a quad-bike is being chased by a gunship. *PC ZONE* does not condone being chased by a helicopter while riding a quad bike. If you're being chased in such a manner, you probably deserve it.



The chief engineer's love for his engines is disturbing.



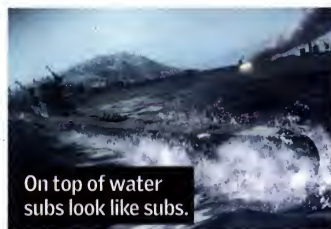
Attack, then run away.



ETA
**SUMMER
2010**



A periscope: the voyeur's favourite.



On top of water subs look like subs.

DIVE! DIVE!

SILENT HUNTER 5

Steve Hogarty gets something salty in his eye...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Romania PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE silent-hunter.uk.ubi.com/silent-hunter-5

THANK CHRIST THERE was somebody in the room who knew a bit about submarines: a German games journalist, who'd ask about periscopes like a terminally ill patient asks about how long he has left to live, and who'd punch the air when he learned of the accurately rendered ship wakes, and the now separate damage readouts for hull integrity and flooding.

The *Silent Hunter* games have always revelled in realism, to the point of accurately depicting the boredom of spending weeks stalking Norwegian fishing vessels in the North Sea. It made actual encounters thrilling as only sims like this can, and the fifth in the series doesn't stray far from that formula.

Main differences here include a first person captain camera, which Ubisoft

Romania claim will enhance the entire 'Captain experience'. In previous games you'd teleport from section to section, and having arrived in the engine room, for example, you could merely pivot and crane your neck around in an inhuman fashion that would surely terrify your crew. Here, you're moving fluidly around your sub, from the fully animated engine room, to the kitchens and the torpedo rooms – all fully staffed by your 3D crew, who'll potter about, attempting to look busy. You can even seamlessly emerge onto the deck (while surfaced, obviously) and scope the horizon for enemies.

EASIER SUBBING

More user aids have been introduced on the easier difficulty settings, making lining up torpedo runs much simpler. To the same effect, your navigational map will display sonar, visual and aural ranges of enemy ships, which contract or expand depending on how deep you are, whether your periscope is up (the tiny wake can be spotted) and the speed of your engines. Successfully remaining stealthy is a matter of slowly moving into position using the engine noise of other ships to mask your own rumbling

motor, and waiting until the perfect moment to surface and strike: all tactics which existed in previous games, but until now they've been beyond the capabilities of the casual submariner.

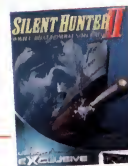
Crew management's also been overhauled. You'll have a handful of officers directly under your command, your executive officer and chief engineer have their own underlings who can be promoted and demoted, and can have their morale broken by repeated failed battles. They'll also accrue experience as they carry out missions, which can be used to increase their abilities in highly specific areas. Want to increase the length of time you can run your submarine silently? Have your chief engineer pile his experience points into efficient battery consumption.

And of course, these are the best waves we've ever seen. They slosh against your hull exactly as they should, and look appropriately watery. Not that I'd dare point out something so remedial in front of the enthusiastic German man, who by the end of the presentation was a gurgling mess on the floor. All that, and I bet he didn't even make a bad seamen joke in his strapline. **PCZ**

THE STORY SO FAR... SILENT HUNTER

SILENT HUNTER
Way old DOS game about submarines, would you believe?

1996

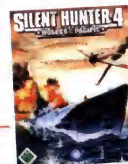


SILENT HUNTER II
Still just as silent, but with a dash of extra hunterness added.

2001

SILENT HUNTER III
Here's where things got good, because it had real 3D submarines.

2005



SILENT HUNTER 4
Soon to be cruelly outdated and replaced by the fifth.

2007

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ New crew management system
- ✓ First-person captaineering
- ✓ Much easier to approach
- ✗ Seasickness

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ON THE EDGE...



BRINK

Steve Hogarty paints his face and expands to twice his normal size

DEVELOPER Splash Damage PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE brinkthegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 210

PAUL WEDGWOOD, CEO of Splash Damage and game director on *Brink*, isn't a big fan of marketing spiel. He's talking about the game's fluid movement mechanic when he sighs: "It's called SMART – smooth movement across random terrain. The marketing guys at Bethesda made us call it that."

Though he's hardly enamoured with the silly moniker, he's rightfully pleased with the feature itself. The multiplayer

shooter from the creators of *Enemy Territory* employs an *Assassin's Creed*-style, multi-functional button which sees you sliding under waist-high bars and vaulting over crates with ease. Don't let the *Assassin's Creed* comparison put you off, it's anything but an easy autopilot ride, and it works with surprising efficiency. Whether Wedgwood likes it or not, it's SMART.

The *Brink* presentation sees Wedgwood nimbly

bounding through sections of The Ark, a floating, near-future, sovereign state temporarily moored somewhere off the coast of San Francisco. As the world economy goes to pot it begins to take on increasing numbers of refugees, unironically referred to as the "guest population" in the wake of the island's previous function as a luxury resort.

"Just because it's a shooter doesn't mean there can't be some narrative and

thematic stuff going on," claims *Brink*'s senior game designer Ed Stern. "You still run around shooting people in the face though," he laughs, "that's absolutely what *Brink* is about."

At E3 we witnessed a mission set in the outlying Container City, and this time around we're seeing it in even more detail. Previously a sprawling storage area for the furniture of the rich and famous, the platform of shipping containers has been transformed into a residential area for the

ETA
**EARLY
2010**

Are we still impressed by ragdolls? Yes.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Visually stunning
- ✓ SMART movement
- ✓ Character customisation
- ✓ Single-player, yet multiplayer
- ✗ Will it all work?

Ah, the 124-7 from Dunstable, right on time.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**SPLASH
DAMAGE**



FOUNDERED
Plucky modders pull
together to form
Splash Damage.

2001



MADE A GAME
Free Wolfenstein:
Enemy Territory seeps
into existence.

2003



AND ANOTHER
Enemy Territory: Quake
Wars destroys the
naming convention.

2007

EVEN MORE
Brink is Splash's first
true original, and
they're pleased with it.

2010

"Splash Damage are working hard to get customisation right"

downtrodden refugees. You and seven other players, assuming the role of Ark Security, must escort a bomb defusal robot to the location of a supposed dirty bomb hidden somewhere in the rusting maze of corrugated sheet metal, chain link fencing and general dock-based detritus, while eight other players take up opposing positions as resistance members. It makes for an interesting, campaign-led melding of single and multiplayer shooting – one that we're seeing more and more of with games like *Left 4 Dead*, *Borderlands* and *APB* joining the charge.

"We're no geniuses," admits Stern. "We're not the only people who've figured out that this sort of game might be fun. We've all played *Left 4 Dead*, and what they've already achieved with that game is just fantastic. We're taking everything we've learned about objective-led gameplay from *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* – things like having to be a particular class to do a certain objective."

Wedgwood's demo reaches something of a crescendo as both security and resistance clash in a small open area. In order to proceed, somebody must blast through a barricade to allow the defusal bot to trundle onwards. Flicking to a radial menu, a shopping list of objectives fills the screen and Wedgwood settles on the order to destroy the resistance's blockade. It immediately breaks down the objective into steps, the first of which is flagged on-screen: find a command post to change class. Wedgwood will have to slip into the role of a soldier before he can plant the explosives.

ME, MYSELF AND I

In doing so, Wedgwood's appearance changes only slightly. *Brink*'s character creation system means you'll have a customised, personalised character upon which you can layer your unlocks and new items – visual class indicators work around the character you've designed.

"What's cool about having a persistent character is that you invest in him," explains Stern. "That's why we make such a big effort in character customisation. That's your guy, he represents you and your status and what you've chosen to unlock, which is why we've gone foaming nuts in terms of the avatar customisation. Tim Applebee, our lead character artist, created

Commander Shepard from *Mass Effect*, and he comes out with this crazy stuff. So no two players will look the same."

Compare this to the Gearbox's similarly co-op driven *Borderlands*, in which every player must choose from only four player models, and you'll begin understand why Splash Damage are working hard to get this customisation engine right.

Stand it next to something like *Team Fortress 2* though, with its



Should we tell him a giant bird's shat on his face?

A NEW HOPE...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

"Vwummm," hums a robed *Steve Hogarty*

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE swtor.com PREVIOUSLY IN 212

BIOWARE'S EXCITING NEW *Star Wars: The Old Republic* reveal at GamesCom last month was so stupefyingly tedious that it's unlikely you even encountered it at all.

Once Peter Moore had staggered off the stage (he'd been lurching about in front of us on a Wii Balance Board for whatever reason), Ray Muzyka took the floor and prepared to drop the next hot info-tato on our laps. What could it be? Playable Wookiee class? First look at the game's space combat? Well not quite: he was here to announce that *The Old Republic* will be localised, voices and all, into both French and German.

ETA
TBC

YA YA JAWAS

To be fair, that's a remarkable undertaking. Some of the more fantastic stats BioWare cart out when talking about their story led, fully voiced MMORPG are that it's the product of a writing team four times larger than usual, that the script is longer than 40 novels, and that there'll be more story content than every other BioWare title combined. That's a lot of text for them to grind through Babelfish.

"Voulez-vous à mon sexy swamp, ce soir?"

Besides the underwhelming revelation of German-speaking Jawas, an infinitely more exciting 15-minute playable demo was also on offer, taking the scenes which were shown at E3 of a Sith Bounty Hunter confronting an impudent Imperial captain on his bridge and allowing us to choose his fate for ourselves. In this instance, we instead take on the role of a Sith Warrior – the classic, lightsaber wielding, melee-focused villain. The

captain we're sent to punish has disobeyed his orders, and we're to either kill him or simply give him a sound telling off. This a decent indicator of how nasty and nice actions are available to both Sith and Jedi. The telling analogy BioWare give is one of a Nazi officer who, rather than defect outright, would instead plot to assassinate Hitler.

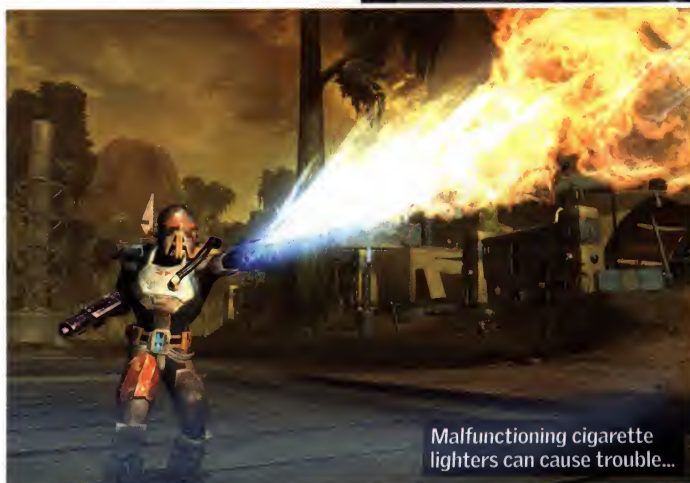
The Old Republic feels remarkably similar to *Knights of The Old Republic* when played, especially when the presentation didn't actually demonstrate many massively multiplayer qualities. There were no groups, the Imperial ship was an instanced area so there were no other players to be found whatsoever – instead we're facing the disobedient captain by ourselves, and at the top of the dialogue tree the option to slice the man in two is too tempting to refuse.

What follows is an attack on the ship by the Republic, and without their captain the crew are unenthusiastic in their offers to help you fend off commandos. Had I chosen to spare the man his life I'd have not only the expertise of a high-ranking Imperial captain (who'll tip you off as to the best route through the ship), but the resourcefulness and respect of his crew (who'll throw themselves headlong into combat beside you). Depending on precisely how much a righteous arse I was after letting the captain live, I'd get varying levels of help.

Had I entered this instance with a group of Sith players, as you would do



Hutts all look the same to us.



Malfunctioning cigarette lighters can cause trouble...

"The Old Republic feels remarkably similar to KOTOR when played"

normally, each opportunity to respond would be randomly bestowed upon an individual player – an interesting dynamic, but one that could potentially frustrate. While dicing the captain is a popular choice, doing so on behalf of teammates and impacting on their personal storyline seems mightily unfair.

MMOTOR

This is a moot point, however, when there are two freshly-seared half-captains strewn about the deck. My lonely onward journey saw me battle through countless assault droids, and the odd be-sabered Jedi.

Force-loaded abilities bring you within melee distance, such as a dramatic leap towards targeted enemies, while area-of-effect blasts take care of larger crowds or mobs.

Force Choke makes a welcome appearance too, working as you'd imagine, crushing throats and decimating hit points.

Such abilities are powered up through normal lightsaber combat, which is as impressively choreographed as that of *KOTOR*'s. Sabers connect properly and character animations are peppered with visual flourishes, all leading to a sense of physicality that's simply not found in other you-hit-me-then-I-hit-you MMOs.

The demonstration ends with a BioWare rep frantically demanding that I loot the corpse of a fallen Jedi to retrieve his weapon, before I swan about the shuttle bay flaunting my dual sabres, deflecting blaster fire and vaulting triumphantly about the room.

You can't get the measure of an MMO in 15 minutes (it takes about two hours,

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's just like *KOTOR*
- ✓ Force Choke!
- ✓ Dialogue choices affect missions
- ✗ Lots of weird emo haircuts

THE STORY SO FAR...
**GEORGE LUCAS
AND ME**



LUCAS IS BORN
Lucas arrives during the Second Planetary War.



I SEE HIM...
...at his ranch, eating salad and talking to an important man.



I SEE HIM AGAIN
I spy Lucas telling some builders how he wants his fountain.



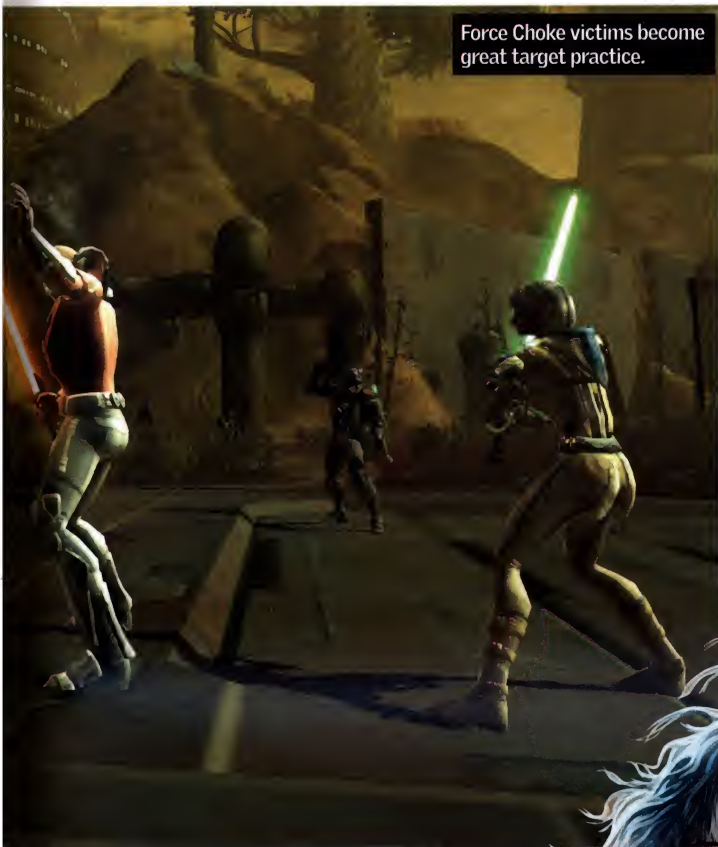
LUCAS DIES?
Based on US life expectancy in the US, George Lucas dies.

1944

2007

2007

2022



Force Choke victims become great target practice.



"Can we get BBC iPlayer on these things?"



"Stick the football on, will you?"



to be fair), but you can quickly ascertain whether or not a game feels right, and *The Old Republic* feels absolutely right. The resemblance to *KOTOR* here is as reassuring as it is startling. That said, we're far from understanding how BioWare's massive, plot-structured universe is going to hang together beyond simply smacking people with glowsticks.

What's certain is that *The Old Republic* will be unlike anything we've used to: an MMO built not upon genre incumbents, but BioWare's shimmering history of class-leading RPGs. With so much still under wraps though, all we can say for now is bonnie chance. And, erm, achtung. **PCZ**



A Hutt palace, if ever we saw one.

A TREAT OF PEAS Sequentially Sith

Teaming up with LucasArts and Dark Horse has led BioWare to the creation of *Star Wars: The Old Republic: Threat of Peace*, a web comic which introduces the *Star Wars* universe in which *The Old Republic* is set, and strings together a bit of narrative leading up to the arrival of new players. There have been 14 issues so far, spanning two acts, tackling such events as the Treaty of Coruscant and the destruction of Republic convoys over Korriban.

If that means nothing to you, the art looks pretty and the words are nice. And it's free, so you're not allowed to complain that it's baffling fan service. Head to swtor.com/media/webcomic to have a look, or just Google it or something. It's the internet. Hardly rocket science.



The gun is far too small for him.

ETA
**EARLY
2010**

SUICIDE IS PAINLESS...

MASS EFFECT 2

Steve Hogarty picks up where he left off in gaming's biggest space opera...

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE masseffect.com

SHEPARD! BUT... BUT you're dead!" cries a baffled Asari crime lord having been backed into a corner by our hero. "I got better," replies Shepard, as cool as a penguin's bum. It's not a dialogue choice, it's right there in the cutscene, otherwise we'd have chosen the option along the lines of "I know, after that E3 trailer I'm just as confused as you about the whole thing."

If you missed it, the debut trailer panned around Shepard's armour, reeling

off a list of his achievements and credentials before flashing the words "Killed in Action" on screen. BioWare aren't talking in any real detail about what it all meant, instead they point me at the playable demo, in which you're very much in control of a living, breathing Shepard. Not only do we have to grapple with the fact that game characters die over and over again as a matter of

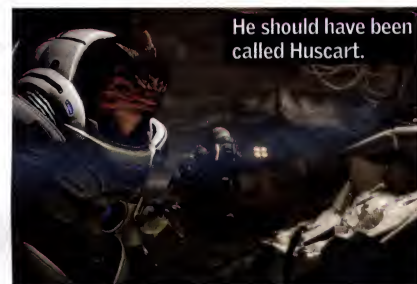
course, now we're told that in BioWare's sci-fi RPG sequel your character can die in a narrative context, and stay dead.

Avoiding this fate seems to be the crux of the second game, which ends in a potentially suicidal mission for Shepard and his team. Play well, amass a decent squad and do your best to keep them alive, and you might just arrive at the end of a game with an

intact main character. The reason it's puzzling is that BioWare are carrying saved games over from the first title.

Mass Effect 2 will have tracked over 60 individual choices you made, from the fate of major characters – if some of your *Mass Effect* mates didn't make it they won't be in *Mass Effect 2* – right down to seemingly inconsequential encounters having unforeseeable repercussions. It means that Shepard's death at the end of *Mass Effect 2* would presumably leave *Mass Effect 3* without a lead. And the trilogy is about Shepard.

Clearly there's more to it than what we've been told, and the developers would rather leave us wallowing in intrigue while they show off the more tactile changes they've made in *Mass Effect 2*. Combat's been scrubbed up well, not least through the introduction of heavy weapons and rocket launchers



Psst... he's behind you.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Uses your *Mass Effect* saves
- ✓ Thane is one cool fish dude
- ✓ Dialogue interruptions
- ✓ Much improved combat
- ✗ The dying stuff confuses us



BORN
Shepard is born. Parents don't give him a first name.

2154



ENTERS SERVICE
At 18, Shepard gets a job shooting at things until they're dead.

2172



MASS EFFECT
The first game takes place. Shepard is 29, if you can't do maths.

2183



MASS EFFECT 2
Shepard dies, or not, depending on how you play.

2184

INTRODUCING...



THANE

Biggest killer since heart disease

Representing and introducing a new race – the Drell – to the *Mass Effect* canon, Thane is a master assassin – a stealthy, devious sort with a cool retro-robo tenor to his voice. You'll first meet him as he completes a mission, when your own objective is to prevent the assassination from ever taking place. He's an intelligent fish-thing, and recognises that he and Shepard, despite having conflicting objectives, are highly skilled at what they do. And as a gun for hire, he'll gladly join your squad.



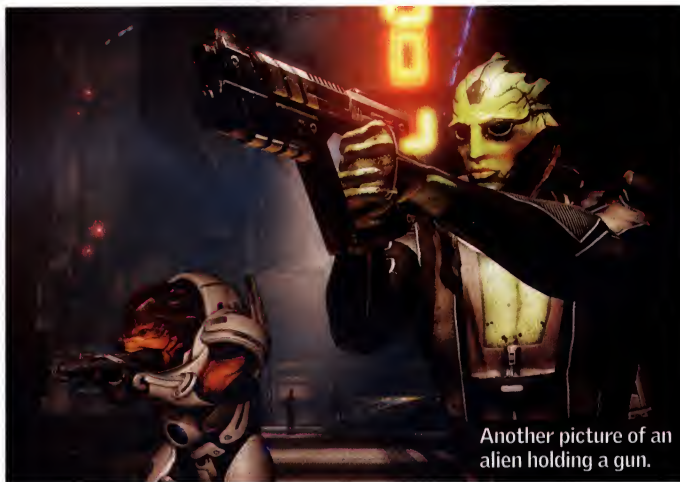
GRUNT

Your new Krogan companion

A significant portion of players will be starting *Mass Effect 2* having finishing *Mass Effect* without Wrex, the toad-faced thug with a heart of a gold. Grunt, another Krogan, will go some way towards replacing Wrex, and what he lacks in thoughtfulness he apparently makes up for in psychopathy. He doesn't care what he's doing, as long as he gets to inflict pain and horror on other living creatures, and tooled up in his power armour means he doesn't have to try too hard to get what he wants.



Thane's looking pretty buff there. Oh hang on...



Another picture of an alien holding a gun.

(there's even a Fat Man-esque nuke launcher to play with), but also by tweaking the AI to be more fun to fight against. Biotics will no longer spam you with their stun abilities, so Shepard won't spend half his fights flopping about on the floor like a fish out of water.

There's an immediately recognisable difference in gun combat as the game is loosed from its RPG moorings. Your rounds carry more impact, scraps feel less floaty and more physical (often literally, as you can punch things), and there's a satisfying sense of connection during exchanges. The cover system's

been fixed, so accidentally sticking to walls and crates is less frequent.

SPECTRE GETHPARD

The brainy tactical hemisphere of *Mass Effect*'s combat hasn't been neglected – you'll still command your squad's roster of special abilities through the power wheel, and this time around you'll have a greater degree of control over the placement and movements of your team. Oh, and having realised the Mako handles like a remote-controlled boat, we'll be getting a new ATV to truck about planetside with.

Mass Effect 2 also introduces Renegade and Paragon actions, dialogue choices that appear fleetingly in conversation to interrupt the other guy mid-sentence. As such you'll have no time to consider consequences, which is appropriate when these actions are intended to be Shepard's impulse reaction (guided by his moral compass) to what's happening around him.

At its least intrusive, Shepard will rudely cut somebody off with a smart-arse remark. In the demo we played, however, Shepard punched somebody through a window in the middle of

a sentence. And while it's hard to think of a similar snap decision being made on the good side of the moral fence (maybe handing over impromptu birthday cakes), it lends a hefty dollop of unpredictability, and insanity, to Shepard's chats.

So to recap, Shepard's not dead. But he probably will be by the time the end credits roll. Our theory is that he'll re-emerge as a sort of Geth-enhanced Robocop character, maybe without him realising that he'd ever croaked his smokes in the first place. We're eager to continue the adventure all the same. Alive or dead. **PCZ**

THE EMPEROR STRIKES BACK...**NAPOLEON:**

David Brown doesn't think being exiled to a tropical island sounds that bad at all really

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE sega.co.uk/games/napoleon-total-war

SOME PEOPLE, AFTER reading my review of *Empire: Total War*, wanted to string me up and splice my main brace. I can't help it if the bugs other people experienced didn't happen to me. Still, it's safe to say that there were some problems that perhaps could and should have been sorted out before release – specifically the AI's total lack of ability to perform invasions over a stretch of water.

QUEST FOR POWER

Of course, that and other issues have since been fixed, tweaked and patched over since release. It's safe to say it's a more stable release than it was originally, even if some of us still haven't had any issues of note. And now comes *Napoleon: Total War*, the first 'expandalone' in the

franchise's history. This English-mangling corporate buzzword means that you don't need the original *Empire* to play *Napoleon*, but if you do own it, some of *Napoleon's* whiz-bang new features will integrate into *Empire*. The stunted Corsican with delusions of grandeur won't have any restrictions imposed upon his quest for glory then.

Napoleon will be much more story-driven than *Empire*, akin to the *Alexander* expansion for *Rome: Total War*. The first of the three different campaigns will focus on Italy (1796), detailing small general's rise to prominence. The setting then shifts to the Middle East (1798), before moving to the Grand European theatre (1805-1812), where he invites everyone to rumble.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Should be less buggy
- ✓ Supply lines
- ✓ More cinematic battles
- ✓ More unique units
- ✓ More focused campaigns...
- ✗ ...that might be too small



TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly say they are drawing inspiration, especially for the first two campaigns, from the Road to Independence bit of *Empire*, while retaining a lot of the core concepts from the main chunk of the game.

Turns have been chopped down to two week periods in a bid to reflect the more micro-historical aspect of the events in question. This also applies to the way the campaign maps have been drawn up, focusing not so much of large regions with a big city plonked in the middle, but on smaller areas, villages and towns.

Three different types of settlement will be available, focusing on either economic, industrial or intellectual pursuits. As you might have guessed, this will also necessitate the introduction of new technology research trees, both to reflect this change in the infrastructure and to cater for inventions

and advances that had been made at the beginning of the 19th Century.

There'll be up to 322 unique units in the game, although some of these will only be usable when playing certain historical scenarios. Interestingly, for those of you who are interested in military history, you might also notice some real-life regiments that are still around dotted about the place. To accommodate so many different varieties of unit, there'll be an increase in the number of soldiers visible on screen during the battles.

Speaking of the battles, Creative Assembly have been stressing how they've wanted to make the battles feel and look more realistic. Smoke, rain and different environmental effects will all have more of a part to play this time round. For example, fight in the rain and there's the chance that your gunpowder will become sodden, leading to the odd misfire that could have a big impact on the

ETA
SPRING
2010



War when the world was more civilised... apparently.

"Sir, I challenge you, sir, to a duel, sir."

"Play as France and everyone will almost certainly hate you"

➤ battle. Position the camera near cannons or cavalry charges and you might just see it juddering about, adding to the cinematic feel of the battles.

As for the units on the field itself, the generals will have been buffed with new abilities. Though Creative Assembly have contradicted themselves a little with this.

GENERAL WARRIOR

They told us these new abilities will make us want to get them involved in combat a lot more frequently, instead of the usual tactic of hiding them at the back to make sure they don't snuff it.

However, they also tell us that the method of recruiting generals will be different, as they'll be drawn from a finite pool instead of just created out of any unit you like.

This indicates that instead of risking him on the frontline, as the developers claim you'll want to do, you'll be even less keen to get him stuck in, because losing a general now would impact on your chances in the long term far more than it used to. A curious idea this is, so we'll have to see how this develops and works out in practice.

One of the biggest tactical additions to *Napoleon* will be supplies. You can't just advance swiftly over the entire map as you feel like it now. You've got to consider the chain of supply, a vital theme that has never really been touched

necks and constantly consume snails was, of course, the disastrous attempt to conquer Tsarist Russia. The sheer scale of the country stretched the French supply lines to breaking point, until his soldiers started freezing to death, in the hollowed out corpses of their horses.

In previous *Total War* games, the only hindrance said expanses would provide would be that it would take you longer to traverse than other areas. Now, you'll have to set up a supply system to stop your guys dying of hunger. To do this, you can build supply depots as you move along. It isn't perhaps the most sophisticated way of handling the issue, but it should suffice. It'll also provide a method for the defending armies to stave off an attack by an force by going guerrilla on the supply depots. Cut off the supply and it doesn't matter how big the enemy's army is, they'll soon be whittled down to nothing.

Diplomacy will be trickier, as you can imagine. Play as France and everyone will almost certainly hate you, being that you're the most powerful and, to win, you basically have to bump them all off. Luckily, you'll be able to play as other

EXILED

The reason the major campaign in *Napoleon: Total War* finishes in 1812 is because that's effectively, but not literally, when Napoleon was finished. After his forces were devastated in Russia, he was then defeated at Leipzig in 1813 and banished to the Tuscan island of Elba. He, of course, hotfooted it back to France less than a year later, but was ultimately beaten at Waterloo in June 1815, before sent packing a little bit further way on the Pacific island of St. Helena. Napoleon died six years later of stomach cancer, though some believe he was poisoned with arsenic in the wallpaper. What the point of that would be, we aren't too sure about.

upon properly in the *Total War* series. This time out, it was absolutely essential to include it, for one main reason: Russia.

The primary reason for Napoleon's first failure to force all Europeans to wear a big string of onions round their

This is not how to give a horse a tracheotomy.

THE STORY SO FAR... NAPOLEON I OF FRANCE



THAT'S HIS PA
Napoleon was born to the Corsican rep of Louis XVI's court.

1769



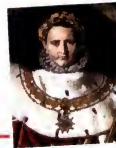
FOR THE PIZZA
Napoleon captured north Italy and the Low Countries.

1797



THIEVING GIT
In Egypt his expedition ended up finding the Rosetta Stone.

1798



PROMOTED
Defeated the Austria at Marengo, and became Emperor.

1800



"I told you we should have got horses. Now PUSH!"



Is that a flag or another sail?



The race to build the biggest snowman was on.



factions as well, so it's not all Francophilia.

A new AI Director system should make the campaign flow better than before, with a substantial raft of improvements being made to the general AI at large. For example, computer-controlled factions will have more short-term campaign objectives, not just "Kill the player at all costs". Hopefully, this will mean some of the quirks of *Empire's* diplomacy will also be ironed out, like certain factions refusing to trade with you, despite you being on the best possible terms with them.

NEW TEMPTATIONS

Civilian units will also have been changed. Gone are the wandering preachers, unrealistic in this particular timeframe, while the Rake has morphed into the Spy, who's able to slip into enemy camp for purposes of sabotage. Gentlemen are still around, and will be able to distribute pamphlets for propaganda and political destabilisation purposes.

Strangely, naval combat seems to have less emphasis placed on it than in *Empire*. Whether this is true or not, only time will tell. It would be a strange decision, given the importance navies played in the Napoleonic Wars: Trafalgar, anyone? Some improvements will be made, like the new ability to repair ships while at sea. Again, whether this means completely repaired or just patched up a bit, we don't know just yet.

Creative Assembly are claiming that *Napoleon* will appeal to a broader base than any other game in the *Total War* franchise. The focus on smaller-scale campaigns instead of distant grand strategy concept will, they say, make it more appealing to regular strategy players. Ones who like to micro- rather than macro-manage, perhaps. This is the sort of thing we can only determine after playing the game first-hand, so we won't

NAPOLEON COMPLEX

Napoleons through the ages

NAPOLEON SOLO

was the lead agent for **UNCLE**, battling the dastardly villains of **THRUSH** through the '60s and beyond.



NAPOLEON WILSON

was a character in John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13*, a convicted killer who ends up on the side of good.

NAPOLEON is a village in the administrative district of Gmina Lipie, which is in the Silesian Voivodeship of southern Poland.



NAPOLEON DYNAMITE

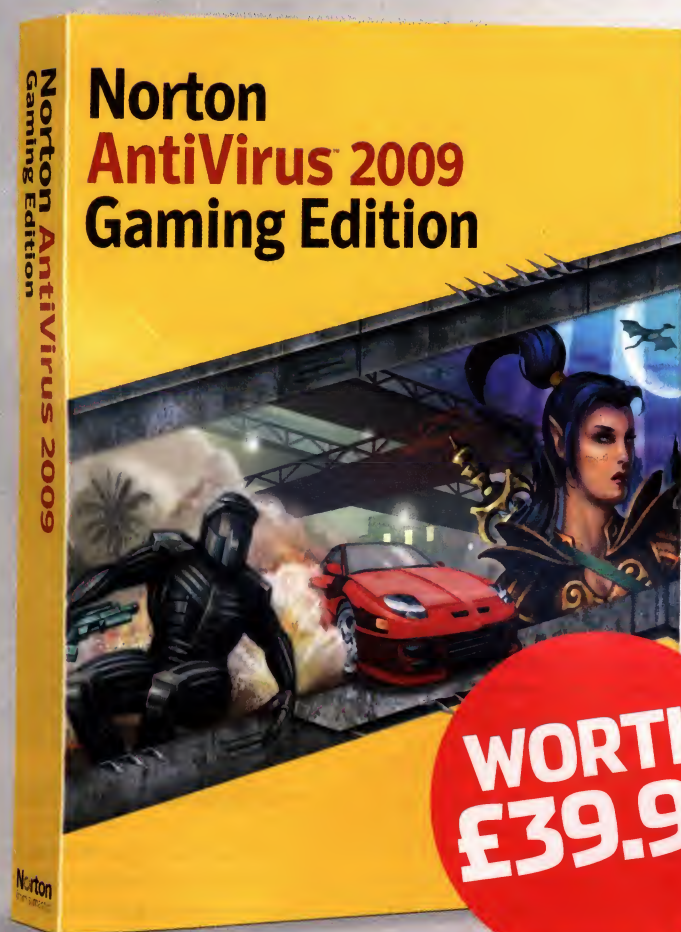
was a very gawky teenager who loves tetherball, drawing and hip-hop dancing.

comment on the validity of these claims just yet.

Having said that, it does make sense that people put off by the sheer scale of the grand campaign will be more likely to embrace a cut-down version. But those who weren't enamoured of *Empire*, won't find that this expansion will change their mind. However, the smaller scale, the extra development, and tweaks made to the engine, might be enough to convince you that it isn't a wreck after all.

Creative Assembly have a history of making good expansions for their games, so we can't see any real reason why this won't follow in that grand tradition. And if you're wondering where Waterloo is, you'll be able to play that as a historical scenario. The main campaign finishes in 1812, so Napoleon's final bow will be taken elsewhere. **PCZ**

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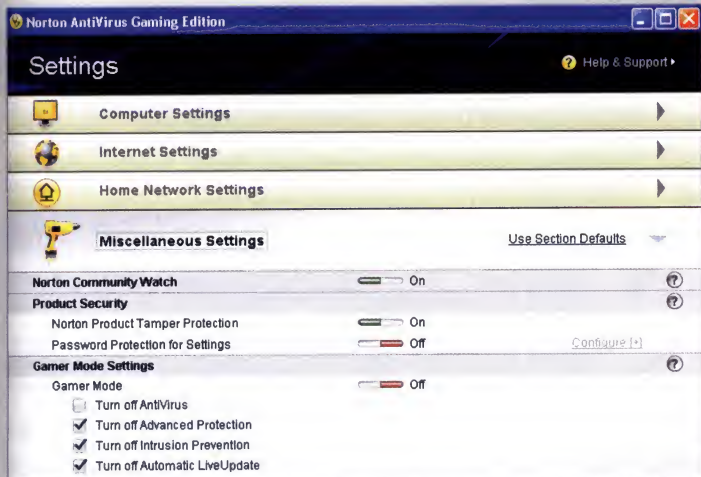
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PC ZONE – the last one to subscribe is spambot pretending to be a cute Russian!

WOW: THE GATHERING...

BLITZING BLIZZCON

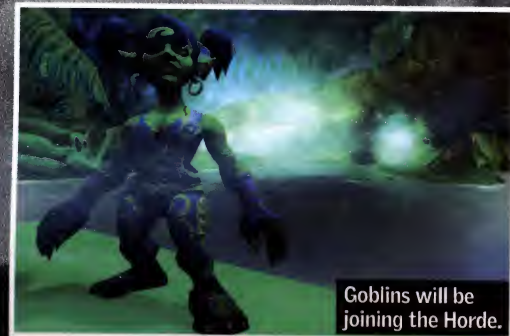
Blizzard fans come together again for their annual fanfest, while *Lesley Smith* looks in from the sidelines



WOW fans engaged in an orgy of MMOing.



Some of the Monk's attacks are pure eye candy.



Goblins will be joining the Horde.

THIS YEAR'S BLIZZCON sold out in less than a minute, proving again that it's the highlight of any year for Blizzard fans. Held in Anaheim in California, the two-day long gaming show delivers announcements, hands-on time with Blizzard's latest games, and dozens of panels where fans could put their questions to the minds behind their favourite games.

This year the show was opened by vice-president Chris Metzen unveiling what's coming up for Blizzard's canon.

WOW GONE WRONG

Metzen announced the Monk – the fourth class for *Diablo III* (page 48) – and then turned his attention to the future of *World of Warcraft*.

While news of *Cataclysm* – the third *WOW* expansion – had already been leaked, the crowds were left rapturous with news of Azeroth's revamp.

Cataclysm promises to devastate Azeroth by returning Deathwing, the former Dragon Aspect.

Although some claim Blizzard are recycling too much old-world content, there are plenty of changes in this package. Flying mounts will be allowed across Azeroth, not just in Northrend and Outland, and you will get seven new zones to explore. These include new starter zones for the two new playable races: the Worgen and their ancient

human kingdom of Gilneas, for the Alliance, while the Horde are getting the Goblins who find themselves displaced by the *Cataclysm* onto the Lost Isles. You will also get *WOW*'s first underwater zone, the sunken city of Vashj'ir, as well as the chance to visit various Elemental Planes, and classic areas of mainland Azeroth such as Uldum, Grim Batol and Hyjal.

As well as revamping all the existing zones, the level cap will be raised to 85, you will be able to change factions (for a fee), and two classic dungeons –

Shadowfang Keep and Deadmines – will be reinvented as heroic dungeons. Guild levelling, new class and race combos, and a new secondary profession – Archaeology – are also on the cards.

While a brief trailer outlined what fans can look forward to in the third expansion, more details were revealed over the rest of the event in panels and interviews, including the tentative release date of sometime in 2010. For these details, turn to page 52.

The rest of the convention was dominated by *StarCraft II*. The first



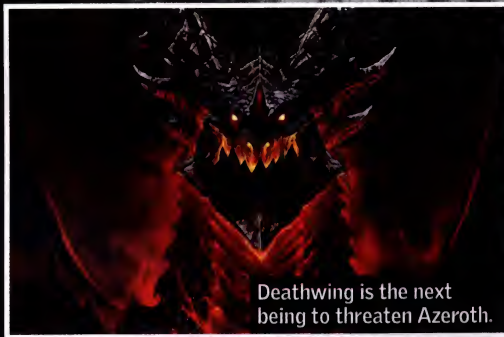
"Cataclysm promises to devastate Azeroth by returning Deathwing, the former Dragon Aspect"



"Blizzard also unveiled the new *StarCraft II* single-player demo which was available to try out"



A dog-man having a cat as a pet? Oh the irony!

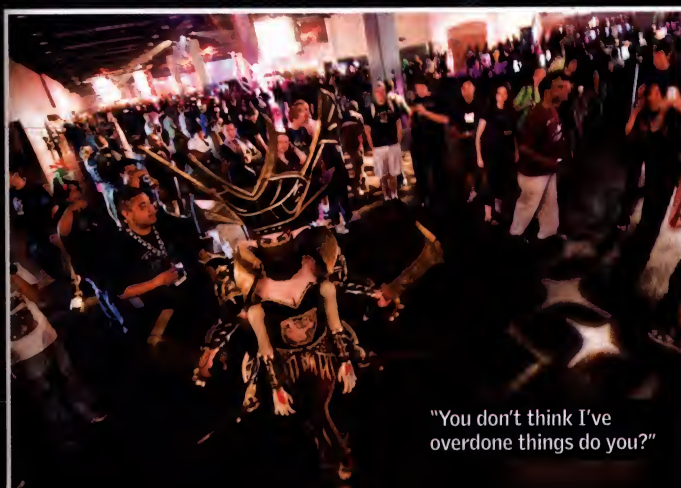


Deathwing is the next being to threaten Azeroth.

part of the gaming triptych – *Wings of Liberty* – has been put back to 2010. This means the second and third instalments, providing Protoss and Zerg campaigns, will also be delayed.

However, Blizzard compensated fans by revealing that many of the original

cast would be returning to voice the game's much-loved characters, while *Chuck* and *Battlestar Galactica* star Tricia 'Number Six' Helfer was announced as the new voice of Sarah Kerrigan, and her Zergified alter ego, the Queen of Blades.



"You don't think I've overdone things do you?"

TAFKNAL80ETC

Blizzard's in-house band level up 'in protest'

While the highlights of the closing ceremony was for many a live set by the Prince of Darkness – no, not Arthas, but *WOW* fanatic and heavy metal deity Ozzy Osbourne, in-house Blizzard rockers Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftain had the honour of being his warm-up act.

While many were concerned the band would sell out in the wake of the Activision-Blizzard merger, lead singer Samwise Didier reassured fans that "There's very little risk of Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftain getting anywhere with their music".

Later that night the band also dinged, and the band pulled a Prince and revealed their new name to be The Artists Formally Known as Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftain, complete with an unpronounceable symbol as their new logo.



Prince's lawyers are heading the band's way now.

The revamped service is due to launch in 2010, before *Wings of Liberty* appears.

The festivities concluded with a closing ceremony, where Blizzard's Paul Sams announced a special thank you gift: 1,000 attendees would be given guaranteed slots in the upcoming *StarCraft II* beta.

This paved the way for the usual warm-up act by Blizzard's in-house band The Artists Formerly Known As Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftain, before the closing concert featuring the Prince of Darkness, Ozzy Osbourne. **PCZ**

MUSIC MAESTROS

Battle.net was the backbone of the original *StarCraft*, and the *Diablo* and *Warcraft* RTS series. But now that Battle.net is being used to log into *WOW*, it's even more important and the system is shaping up to be a bit like Xbox LIVE! but with that Blizzard twist.

They will also allow you to create your own maps for *Warcraft* RTS games and *StarCraft* and upload them for other players to access and play.



Mmmm... elves...

A BUG'S LIFE...

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

Steve Hogarty's faced with yet another infestation...

DEVELOPER Blizzard PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard WEBSITE starcraft2.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 212



unveiling of a host of new Battle.net features that seemed to excite the majority of fans. Their online gaming network, according to the stats Blizzard proudly tout, is the world's biggest – trumping the likes of Xbox LIVE easily – though its influence has been anything but far-reaching.

The relaunch introduces integrated friends lists, structured league tables and tournament creation tools, marketplace functionality for hawking mods and map packs, and the ability to chat with your mate while they play *World of Warcraft*. More than that, it's an important image refresh for as seemingly peripheral service, a distinctly '90s feeling relic that'd be dead in the water had *Warcraft III* not developed such an unshakeable fanbase. The bottom line from Blizzard is this: it's all new and shiny and we should be terribly excited. But back to the game.

The mission we were given to try out was to evacuate the planet of Agria. Hovering in space somewhere and hunched over a holographic interface, Jim Raynor receives a distress call from a Doctor Swann, a plea to rescue colonists from an incoming Zerg invasion



force. Another equally urgent task pulses on my galaxy map, but the planet of Agria, when compared to the dull beige ping-ping ball of this other planet, looks to be the more interesting venture.

BUG PROBLEMS

Raynor's team are delivered to the map in a dropship – a handful of Firebats (flamethrower wielding, short range heavies) and the more generic marines make up your initial force. The map itself is little more than a colony and a port connected by a winding, S-shaped road, and the objective is equally basic: escort a van as it carries 50 colonists to the port in five trips.

The Zerg have wonderful timing here, with each wave of attacks becoming consistently more vicious until they're

ONLY ONCE YOU'VE wandered into *StarCraft II*'s greased-metal cantina and engaged in conversation with embittered mercenaries, or spoken to Jim Raynor's crew about armour upgrades and the like, do you begin to understand why, and how, the Terran, Protoss and Zerg campaigns will be split into three separate titles.

THREESOMES

The interface, the entire facade of moving your character through the world to access what are essentially fancy menu options, isn't something that can be reskinned to work for an insectoid menace. Unless they're more sociable than their flesh-tearing forearms would lead us to believe. The three games will

be justifiably unique in their approach to fast-paced, real-time strategy, even before you've reached the good fight.

The real revelations had little to do with *StarCraft II* itself, however. Our lengthy playtest in our previous issue laid bare the bulk of the single-player campaign, but instead it was Blizzard's

HOT STUFF

Attention non-static environment fans



BEFORE

Your good pal Tychus has tasked you with securing some minerals strewn about the surface of this volcanic planet. A new unit is also made available, a high-jumping Reaper capable of bounding large distances. "But why?" You might wonder. "This lava poses seemingly no threat at all. Unless..."



AFTER

Of course, the lava soon floods the chamber, and your hopping Reaper units are soon needed to lure Zerg from their lairs and into this fiery pit of rapidly advancing molten doom, like unfortunate cockle-pickers. Reapers' jumps leave them vulnerable to attack though, so clever timing and resourcefulness are essential.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ There's an actual plot
- ✓ Presented beautifully
- ✓ Missions have a uniquely handmade feel
- ✓ It's Blizzard, they're infallible
- ✗ We're rubbish at it, naturally

THE STORY SO FAR... BATTLE. NET

BIRTH
Allowed players to chat and connect to multiplayer games.

STARCRAFT
StarCraft's arrival saw a dramatic increase in users.

TOP OF THE HEAP
By now Battle.net boasted well over 3 million users.

REBIRTH
And now it's reported to be the biggest gaming thing ever.

1997

1998

2000

2010

In the future, terraforming operations will be run by Tesco.

"In this way, *StarCraft II* missions are tightly defined and replayable games in themselves"

dropping in from the sky right next to your tin of defenceless civilians.

There are frustrations to be found – the van cannot be ordered to stop and cannot be told when to leave, and if you begin to flag in one wave, you'll be hard-pressed to prepare for the next. The challenge mounts regardless of whether or not you're rising to it, while few concessions are made to strategy-blind morons like myself, there are no quicksaves or checkpoints.

Repeated attempts, however, reveal the thinking behind Agria's design – it's short, and Blizzard want you to crack it

in a single shot. The colonists will ferry themselves to the port automatically to prevent you amassing an armada of Firebats – Blizzard want you to be efficient and to build a balanced and effective squad. Finding the right ratios of medics to marines, and marines to Firebats, and knowing when to use the roadside bunkers (pretty much never, considering the Zerg seem to enjoy smashing them up so much), is key to keeping fatalities down.

Of course, I couldn't manage this seemingly simple task, allowing countless civilians to have their heads lopped off by



flailing Zerg claws and eliciting pained cries from Dr Swann along the lines of "Oh God, the slaughter... I can't bear to look."

VARIABLE BATTLES

If on the other hand, you were any good at *StarCraft II*, there are Zerg chrysalises to harvest for an extra challenge – and you can even take the fight back to their hive if you really want to show them up.

In this way, *StarCraft II* missions are tightly defined and replayable games in

themselves, with often bespoke rules and objectives you won't encounter in other areas. A great example of this is a directive that takes you to a volcanic chamber which regularly floods with lava. Not only does it look fantastic but it's a game-changing variable, and one you won't have been practicing for.

Originality and ingenuity abound, then, and all astoundingly well-presented in this point-and-click style overworld populated by slick, well-acted and highly exaggerated military men. We can't wait to be awful at this game. **PCZ**

Molest a train, it's the *StarCraft* way!



And then, in the middle of the carnage, someone sneezed.

MONKFISH...

DIABLO III

"Whatcha gonna do with all that monk? All that monk inside your trunk?" enquires *Steve Hogarty*

DEVELOPER Blizzard PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard WEBSITE www.diablo3.com

SAY HELLO TO the monk, the recently revealed *Diablo III* class who rather than sitting cross-legged in a hill-top monastery, is far more likely to slap you 100 times in a second before appearing behind you and kicking you in the arse. That's his trick, and he sidles up to the three revealed classes – the Barbarian, Witch Doctor and Wizard – filling the fourth slot on the *Diablo III* character selection screen and shuffling next to the question mark obscuring the yet-to-be unveiled fifth guy.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Monk is a nimble fighter
- ✓ Game itself is utterly simple
- ✓ And yet deceptively complex
- ✓ Also looks amazing
- ✗ Not all that advanced
- ✗ Will be dull for some

While my peers sipped champagne with a man dressed as the Lich King (Blizzard's stand in Cologne was celebrating the launch of BlizzCon on the other side of the planet), I instead resigned myself to the booth's back room, where machines running Blizzard's click-a-thon were duly whirring away, oblivious to the frivolities happening all around them.

DESERT WARFARE

The quest on show involved finding a path to the doomed city of Alcanus, through a desert with menacing location names like The Howling Plateau and The Scything Winds.

The ambiguously titled Fallen formed the desert's cannon fodder enemy, small impish creatures wielding clubs and short swords who'd attack in packs of around 12. Occasionally they'd be led by a mage who'd attempt to resurrect fallen Fallen, but these creatures are little more

than the area's XP bubblewrap. The real menaces are the dune dervishes, whose whirling blades force you into a hasty retreat. There was also something big that tore me to bits far too quickly for me to notice what it was.

The monk himself is a melee combat specialist, less lumbering than the rippling mass of twitching muscle that's



A feisty barbarian, between some legs.

The Monk – straight out of *Street Fighter*.

ETA
**LATE
2010**

The monk's Way of the Hundred Fists in full swing.



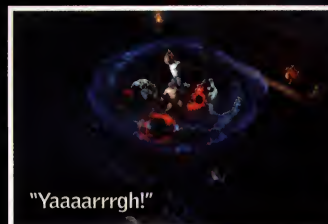
This guy will take some amount of clicking on.



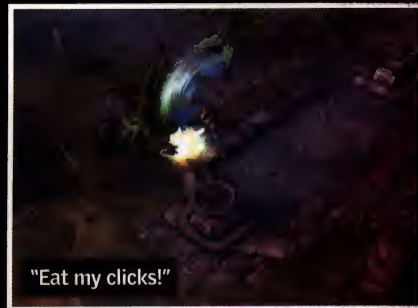
Ain't afraid of no goats.



Bridges, always with the bridges.



"Yaaaarrrgh!"



"Eat my clicks!"

the barbarian, but more physically able than the other two spellcasters, and potentially more gory than the rest combined. His main attack (at level 12 at least, the point at which I was allowed take up the reins) is the Exploding Palm, which I will now discuss in excruciating detail because honestly, I haven't played anything like *Diablo* since completing *Divine Divinity* and, when it comes to clicking on things to make them dead, I'm feeling a little underqualified.

Exploding Palm is a three-part attack, the first part landing a blow to the tune of 40% of your weapon's maximum damage. Part two does the same, but at 60% of your maximum damage. Part three is where things get interesting, causing bleeding for 70 seconds on your chosen target and, if they succumb to your onslaught, causes them to explode in a rapidly expanding hemisphere of globulose blood, stringy, burnt flesh and bony shrapnel.

Absurdly, that's the third click of one of your most basic attacks – a move that makes enemies disintegrate with explosive force, taking out bystanders and leaving a wide, bloody smear across the floor. The sort of spectacle usually reserved for a high-end, mana-sapping superpower in other games happens pretty much on every third click of the left mouse button in *Diablo III*, and needless to say, you'll be seeing a lot of it.

Driving my monk onwards, I happen upon a quest from Poltahr the treasure hunter. This would lead me into some underground ruins to retrieve the idol of Rygnar with the cheering, blood-thirsty Poltahr in tow. Loot spewed from downed enemies. Unidentified skullcaps

and magical swords (unequippable by the monk class, who uses two-handed staves) were left littering the dungeon floor. I wasn't interested in vendor junk, given the time I had, but sifting through the detritus threw up some nice finds. My Monster Clutches gloves gave me a 13% increased chance of finding magical items, while my "Amulet of Devouring" awarded me one life point per hit. Which was nice.

The monk's defensive abilities are highlighted in the class's cinematic introduction. His Impenetrable Defense skill protects him from damage for three seconds while he spins his staff about in all directions. This is replaced later by Inner

"When it comes to clicking on things to make them dead, I'm feeling a little underqualified"



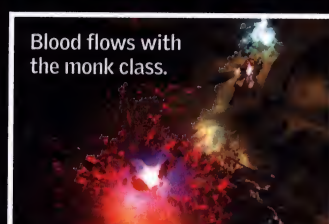
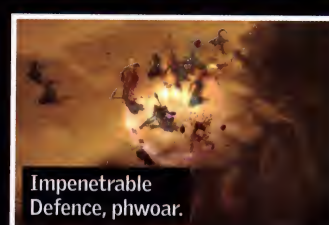
BEWITCHED

The Witch Doctor is a tribal mystic sort, taking elements from *Diablo II*'s Necromancer and Druid. Some of his more impressive skills include chuckable firebombs, and the Horrify skill, which projects a menacing voodoo apparition above the Witch Doctor to terrify nearby enemies, sending them into a panic. Follow this up with the Locust Swarm ability and you'll start shearing flesh from bone with the help of millions of your hungry insect friends.

Driving the Witch Doctor through the desert forced us to approach enemies in a different way. The dune dervishes, whose spinning blades caused the typically melee-led monk some consternation, were far more easily dispatched with the panic-inducing, long-range attacks of the Witch Doctor.

Cast your Confusion skill around the dervish, and enemies will throw themselves into its vortex of scythes. Fun.

"The old stereotypes prove true: *Diablo III* is a game about clicking"



THE STORY SO FAR...
DIABLO



DIABLOS

A biker gang (like the Hell's Angels) who did way-cool crimes.

1960



DIABLO

Americans say "Dee-ablo". We say "Dye-ablo". Madness.

1995



DIABLO II

Thinking about it, "Dee-ablo" is likely the proper pronunciation.

2000

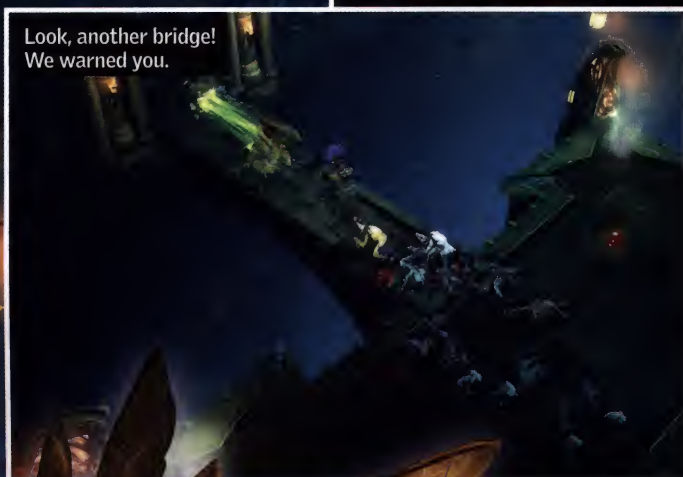


DIABLO III

It's Spanish for "devil" isn't it? Hmm, they'd most likely say "Dee".

2010

Look, another bridge!
We warned you.



➤ Sanctuary, which paints a ring around the monk into which enemies can't enter, creating breathing space while you dish out area-of-effect attacks without fear of retribution.

Retrieving the idol of Rygnar and completing the quest levelled me up – an event that carries with it a shockwave that lops limbs from enemies – and I dropped my new skill point into Way of the Hundred Fists.

Similar to the monk's basic attack, this is made up of three parts: a dash, six rapid-fire hits (not 100, the lying bastards) and then a radial attack

Prepare to kill 4,000
of these flying things.

The barbarian isn't
ashamed of his "Hulk
smash" philosophy.



**"Diablo III is not a tectonic shift
forwards for the click-a-thon genre"**

hitting all nearby enemies for 80% weapon damage.

Use this inside your Inner Sanctuary and, if you're anything like me, you'll feel pleased that you've managed to thread two abilities together. I looked around to see if any impressed developers were nodding in appreciation, instead a sad-looking woman in a Blizzard T-shirt took my beer away and told me off for bringing it into a room full of electronics.

FUNKY MONK-Y

Talking in such detail about the intricately balanced skillset detracts from the visceral thrill of simply playing *Diablo III* though, and to an extent (especially as the barbarian) you can run through the game without paying attention to your buffs.

The old stereotypes prove true: *Diablo III* is a game about clicking. Click to attack, click to move, click to pick up items and gold. Attacks are bound to the left and right mouse buttons, with buffs and spells laid out across the number keys, while the tab key swaps in a third attack skill to replace whatever's bound to the right mouse button.

Simplicity is what drives *Diablo III*. It's an immediately engaging adventure, now bolstered by the fine detail covering every inch of its world and the weightier narrative given to each of the character classes. They're a chatty bunch now, with NPCs responding appropriately to the class you've chosen. Wizards aren't trusted, while Barbarians are feared. The monk's a brooding sort, but no matter what class you choose you can be certain thousands of hovering exclamation marks will want your attention.

Crumbling architecture brings a level of physicality to your more powerful abilities, while swarms of enemies demonstrate the game's brutality and gore. Blasting a host of enemies from a bridge using Way of the Hundred Fists never fails to satisfy, and though you'll wonder how half the masonry you encounter has managed to stay upright for as long as it has (especially when a stiff breeze seems to be all that's needed to bring things tumbling down), the flashy physics are a welcome spectacle – even if the isolated way in which they're employed can be off-putting.

Diablo III is not a tectonic shift forwards for the click-a-thon genre, rather it's a refined, updated stab at it. And with the series' revival Blizzard will undoubtedly lead the genre with as much authority as they demanded from us almost a decade ago. What's really astounding is how effortless they've made it all look. **PCZ**

THE LORE

Deathwing is an angry dragon who lived underground for a very long time. One day he bursts out, tearing a massive fire-belching chasm across the continents of Azeroth and setting the stage for this expansion.

Deathwing the Destroyer is one of five Dragon Aspects, forged by the Titans and tasked with protecting Kalimdor. But since being driven mad by the Old Gods he's been warring endlessly with mortals.

Designer Chris Metzen explains:

"What's happened to spark this is that Deathwing has awoken from his slumber and erupted into the world.

He's so powerful that his explosion into the physical plane has caused the Cataclysm. Tidal waves, massive volcanic eruptions at a global level, tsunamis, freak storms. No part of the world has been left untouched."

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm

Azeroth is transforming, old enemies have been reborn, and 11 million players are about to be rocked by the biggest update to *World of Warcraft* yet. It's the end of the world as we know it, and *Steve Hogarty* is your tour guide to the Armageddon...

THE RACES

WORGEN

The feral hounds will be introduced to the Alliance as their sixth playable race, and can play as any class bar Paladin and Shaman. Their existence stems from an ancient curse which spread rapidly through the city of Gilneas. Naturally, as werewolves they can assume human forms outside of combat, though when in their wolfy bodies they're known to be savagely violent. Their racial trait is just that: the ability to transform into their lupine state, giving them a brief speed increase.

GOBLINS

The Goblins are short green bastards fuelled by greed and cunning ingenuity. Previously a neutral faction, their inventiveness and engineering skills arguably led to *WOW*'s best quests, and their mercantile prowess amassed them fortunes. Trade relations drive them into an alliance with the Horde, and they become their sixth playable race. Racial traits play on their reputation of being money-driven inventors, with rocket packs and the ability to sacrifice cash for a temporary boost in strength being touted.

THE CHANGES

Besides the modest level cap increase (from 80 to 85, leaving plenty of space in the run up to 100 for about three more expansions), *Cataclysm* will introduce a hefty slew of updates, changes, alterations, introductions and tweaks. Here are just a handful of the more important ones...



"Do you like my horse?
It's got gold on it."

GUILD CHANGES

Guilds will now work their way up through 20 levels, where progression is based on the actions, and levels, of individual guild members. Each guild level earned will award that guild with a talent point, which can be spent on, well, guild talents – things like mass resurrection for all guild members. Guild XP can also be converted into guild currency, allowing guilds to purchase vanity items like flags. And achievements should mean that guilds will become more than simply the sum of their members, and could offer players benefits they might not get elsewhere.

CLASS, MEET RACE

Dwarves will be able to become Mages and Shamans; Gnomes Priests; Humans Hunters, and Night Elves Mages. Blood Elves will get access to Warriors; Forsaken the Hunter class; Orcs Mages; Taurens both Paladins and Priests; and the Trolls will finally be allowed to be Druids.



PvPvPvPvP

Cataclysm's Tol Barad will be a vast open PvP arena. Three Battlegrounds have been added, as well as Rated Battlegrounds which introduces ranked competition and a whole different kind of point to accrue – alongside Honor you'll also maintain a rating and earn arena points.

PATH OF THE TITANS

The Path of the Titans progression system will give players who've reached the new level cap of 85 an extra way to continue to advance their character. This will draw on two new introductions, the Archaeology skill (used to discover and trade in Titan artifacts) and ancient glyphs. After joining a Titan cult, you'll rank up in your chosen path through questing and PvP, unlocking up to 10 talent-bestowing ancient glyphs. Path of the Titans works independently of race and class, so go hog wild.

COME FLY WITH ME

With all that geography having changed so drastically, Blizzard have found the time to make flying mounts work in Azeroth, as well as the Outlands. As a by-product of this, the Draenei and Night Elf starting zones have been instanced.



More endgame content means more joy.



SCORCHED EARTH

Regardless of whether or not you purchase *Cataclysm*, zones will be altered. The Barrens will be split in half and pocked by canyons and lava flows. Desolace has been slapped with a tsunami, and now has some flora, and capital cities will be reinforced to withstand the harsh new world.

New class-race combinations mean we don't know who this is.



Gilneas, home of the Worgen and local basketball champs.

MORE... STUFF

New zones will contain new quests, new enemies, new dungeons and new raids, naturally enough.

Gilneas will be the starting area for Worgen, while the Lost Isles (and presumably the Goblin homeland of Kezan) will be the same for the Goblins.

Deepholm (the elemental plane from which Deathwing erupted) will also feature, should you want to chuck yourself into one of the many yawning fissures stretching across the world.

OUR THOUGHTS

Cynical as you might want to be about the steamroller that is Blizzard's MMO superpower, *Cataclysm*'s extensive roster of tweaks have already whipped the die-hard fans into a fine, greasy froth, while the larger, more tangible changes – namely that everything in Azeroth being broken by an angry, lava-spewing dragon – should serve to please those who might not fully understand what an ancient glyph is. Here's an MMO that isn't allowed to settle or age, and whose expansions are anything but formulaic.

But to wonder how well *Cataclysm* will be swallowed by the community is pointless. They'll absorb it joylessly through scarred-retinas and fingertips as cracked and calloused as the newly corrupted ground beneath their avatar's feet. What will be interesting, as ever, is how much pull this will have with lapsed players. Or the increasingly scarce subset of the population who've never touched the thing.



Welcome back...

THINK YOU'RE READY?



Call in air support? AH-1Z attack helicopters will unleash hell from the sky, but you'll have to eliminate any AA threat before they can move in for the kill.



Flank right and take the high-ground? Deploy your sniper to eliminate Anti-Tank squads from distance to allow M1A2 Abrams to roll into the valley.



Order your fire-team into the M3M (GAU-21) equipped HMMWV to draw out and assault PLA forces... but risk becoming a high-priority target for AT threats?

OPERATION

FLASHPOINT

DRAGON RISING

WWW.FLASHPOINTGAME.COM STREETS OCTOBER 9TH 2009



PLAYSTATION 3



OFFICIAL **FUTUREPRESS** STRATEGY GUIDE AVAILABLE NOW



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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the
latest PC games

ON GAMESCOM...

A **GREASY, SHRIVELLED SPONGE** man hobbles around a labyrinthine warehouse. The air is heavy mess of unintelligible rumbles, and the man's crabby hands paw his face, as if to reassure himself that his head is still there. Wincing, he rounds a corner and stumbles into a darkened room, seeking to escape the piercing shards of light falling from the ceiling.

"Are you here to see *Mass Effect 2*?" asks a young woman of good posture. The man croaks, and is led by the arm deeper into the enclave and past a cardboard cut-out of a dancing *MySims* character. "The presentation will begin shortly," she chirps as she skips away.

Jesse Houston, the game's associate producer, smiles as the withered man fumbles with a Dictaphone. His spidery fingers find the record button, and he begins: "So what changes have you made to the combat?" He sighs as he slides out of his seat. A slumped, exhausted carcass.

Find out what else I saw at GamesCom starting on page 22!

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

**MUST
BUYS!**



PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead Empire: Total War



56

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

Have Codies made a war that'll please realists and gamers?

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC
(90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the preferred selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

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The famous flying rodent is back. Was this PhysX-enabled delay really worth it?
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SWEARS...**

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

"You pull the trigger
of my love gun."

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

DRAGON RISING

David Brown never thought he'd enjoy being in the army

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE codemasters.com/flashpoint
ETA 9 October
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

The sequel-in-name to one of the best military sim games of all time, stakes a greatness by reducing its focus on extreme realism.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Dual core 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0.

HOW IT STACKS

OPERATION FLASHPOINT:
DRAGON RISING 90%

OPERATION
FLASHPOINT 90%

ARMA II 70%

I NEVER FINISHED the original *Operation Flashpoint*. I got to a mission where I had to escort some convoy of trucks over a large distance, and singularly failed to do so.


Believe me, I tried to protect my AI companions, but they just kept getting blown up. I can't even remember how they bought it – mines, rockets or merely plain old bullets – but they died, again and again. Again and again and again.

There was also that mission where you're told to escape to the beach. You start in a forest, bereft of allies and have to make it past the entire enemy army without getting spotted once, because if they saw you, BAM! you were dead. One shot to the face from a tiny set of pixels that had just appeared on the horizon sent you right back to the beginning. Or to the solitary save point you were allowed.


Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising doesn't have save points, it uses checkpoints. Whoa there, hold on a minute. Don't go slouching off, grumbling about consoles and whatnot. It's not that bad. These checkpoints actually work. They don't always work, but they do the job better than the solitary save game in the first game did allowed. This is one game you'll actually finish before your hair falls out and you start looking longingly at cardigans in shop windows. If you want to keep it real and are into masochism, you can always just the game on Hardcore mode and not have any saves at all.

For those of you who are baffled by the words I've just written, let me elucidate. *Dragon Rising* is a game where you get to play as a US soldier in the liberation of the



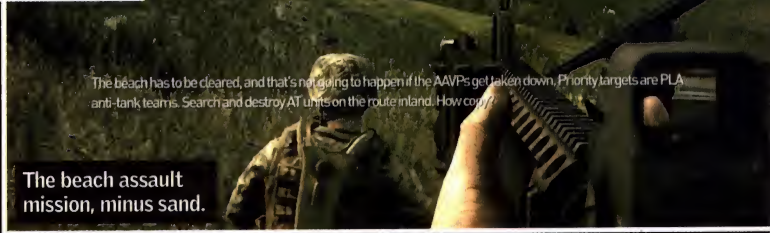


"OK, that's one post-traumatic stress disorder with fries coming up."



"They'll never know what hit them."

"This is one game you'll finish before your hair falls out"



The beach has to be cleared, and that's not going to happen if the AAVPs get taken down. Priority targets are PLA anti-tank teams. Search and destroy AT units on the route inland. How copy?

The beach assault mission, minus sand.

"It's nowhere near as bug-ridden as *ArmA II* was on release"

"Come on baby, light my brush fire."

[2] Jedburgh

Dagger One Bravo, this is Dagger One. Copy that, good work. You are to move South to rejoin the rest of Dagger One. How copy?

Using cover is vital to your success.

Use the map wisely...

fictional island of Skira. The people you're booting out are the Chinese People's Liberation Army, who've decided that the oil reserves contained underneath Skira are worth killing for. They plonk their troops in, Russia gets angry, the US is called in, and Uncle Sam proceeds to kick some PLA ass.

LISTEN UP MAGGOT

Your first mission is essentially a tutorial, although it never once drags you by the pubes down certain routes. There's also no patronising "Press W to move forward, left-click to fire" either. It errs too much on the 'let the player get on with it' side of things, telling you the name of the command you need to issue, but not which key that corresponds to. A quick scan through the key commands list will sort you out, but it does interrupt the flow a little. This doesn't happen a lot, though, so it's more a minor little quirk than anything else. Nearly everything in

the game is intuitive and easy to get to grips with, except perhaps the radial command menu.

This will probably get the most attention from irate fanboys. The deal is that you press Q and a radial menu appears. You then press one of the WSAD keys to pick a subsection, and so on. It's clearly designed for an analogue stick and can be a bit clunky, especially when you're bogged down in combat and all you want to do is tell your guys to defend a position or engage an enemy. A small number of commands can be issued on the map, but generally, if you want to tell your guys what to do, you'll use the radials. It takes time to get used to where certain commands are and how to get to them quickly, but once you do getting your comrades to do what you want is easy. Usually.

This is a game that relies heavily on AI, but sometimes it'll fall over.

However, it's nowhere near as bug-ridden as its rival *ArmA II* was on release. There aren't amusing/frustrating moments like finding your CO's mangled corpse under his desk at the beginning of a mission for no reason. What'll happen instead is that maybe one of your guys won't duck down quick enough behind a wall and get his head blown off by a lucky shot. Certainly, it's annoying, but unless you're playing on

Hardcore mode, they'll get revived when you pass through the next checkpoint.

Unrealistic this might be, but it does mean your frustration levels won't boil over if your guys do something a bit dumb. It might offend some people's sensibilities, but it sure beats going back miles back to the last checkpoint.

Perhaps the best thing about *Dragon Rising* is how you feel challenged by a difficult game, yet never so frustrated that you throw the mouse down in anger and hurry for the uninstall button. Sometimes you'll get killed by a great shot from an enemy soldier, which'll force you to repeat a significant section of a mission. Yet instead of frustrating you, it makes you think of new ways of approaching that mission. If you're getting pinned down by tanks or vast numbers of soldiers, perhaps when you do it again you'll approach the situation from a different angle to see if that makes a difference.

This is a game of exploration and options, where the solution isn't just "go this way or not at all". It's challenging and hardcore, but always accessible. You'll almost certainly make mistakes and be cursing either luck or ineptitude (either your own or your allies') but you'll also be learning all the time,

SAVED BY THE BELL

Anybody who's played through the original *Far Cry* knows that checkpoints and autosaves can be the tools of the gaming devil, but they're thankfully well-considered in *Dragon Rising*. They're placed intelligently in missions, and the only problem we really had with them was the relatively narrow areas in which they're activated. They're also marked on the map so you know where you have to go in order to activate them. Again, purists might balk at this, but it has to be better than the old "when's the next bloody checkpoint going to come along?" system.

GARDENING AT NIGHT

How to win friends by blowing up people



1. THE SETUP

Sometimes stealth is required to break the enemy. In this mission, our task is to blow up a fuel dump's generator unit, while our allies provide a distraction from the south-east.



2. NIGHT OWLS

Night vision goggles are invaluable in a mission like this. Note the silencers on their guns, as in some stealth missions you won't have them. Luckily you do this time.



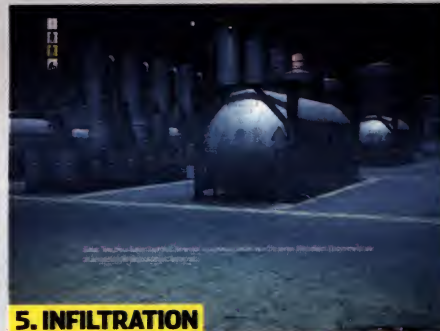
3. RECON

The handy '1' symbol indicating what we have to blow up. We could go straight in and risk a head-on assault, but it's best to stick to the plan and wait for the diversion.



4. SCOPED OUT

This guy is keeping watch over the fuel dump below. Take him out, steal his ruined hut and wait for the signal to infiltrate the facility below. Patience is key here.



5. INFILTRATION

We're in. No need for night vision here, we just have to make sure we don't get spotted. The diversion has drawn away the vast majority of resident troops, but care is still needed.



6. GET TO DA CHOPPA!

The generator is destroyed and we've cleaned up a few PLA patrols. But while we were getting in the chopper, one of the gunners got his head blown off by an enemy. Nice touch.

thinking about new ways to achieve the goal, and because it's virtually all driven dynamically with very few scripted events, each time the outcome will be slightly different.

This is probably true of most open-world games, but I don't think I've ever felt it as strongly, as innately, as I did when playing *Dragon Rising*.

This same freedom of expression continues into the night missions, not all of which involve special operation types

and silenced weapons. Indeed, the first one you embark upon is particularly tricky due to the fact you really have to keep that trigger finger in check. One shot and the whole place lights up and, given that the area is swarming with PLA troops, not to mention the deadly threat of patrolling gunships, it is crucial to be sensible in your choices. Going in all guns blazing will not only make you fail your secondary objective (don't be seen) but will result in your quick demise.

You might be able to bandage your wounds if you take a non-lethal hit, but that's not easy to do in the middle of a field with bullets kicking up dirt around your prone body. Speaking of healing, you've also got a medic as part of your squad, someone who can help in patching up your AI squad mates or just giving you a shot from a magic syringe. This replenishes the blood you've lost and is another attempt to make the non-hardcore experience a little less unforgiving. Again, if you crave realism, stick it on the Hardcore mode.

Missions themselves are reasonably varied, both from the start of the game and in how they develop. There are the aforementioned stealth missions where you'll have to secretly blow up a fuel dump or some anti-aircraft guns, plus you've also got rescue, beach assault and capture-and-hold-location missions.

They all involve shooting a load of PLA troops, of course, but often you'll be sufficiently intrigued by the objectives of the next mission to bring in the whole "one more go" factor.

The military fetishists out there are going to be a little disappointed with the range of guns, weapons and so on that

are available. While there are enough different types of gun or vehicle to keep a layman like myself satisfied, those who have an interest in military ordnance, *Arma II* has the edge.

And you can't be a sheep or a cow in *Dragon Rising* either. The mission editor won't be as comprehensive as the *Arma II* modding toolset Bohemia recently released (which is on this issue's DVD, in case you're interested), but there's certainly sufficient depth, especially when you start getting involved with the LUA scripting language to create elaborate scenarios. Whether you'll be able to create those amazing night battles so prevalent on YouTube, we'll just have to see.

Another direct point of comparison with *Arma II* is performance and issues thereof. Because *Dragon Rising* is, to be blunt, more of a game than Bohemia's effort, it also runs a hell of a lot better. Let's face it, awe-inspiring in terms of depth and complexity *Arma II* might be, it sometimes forgets it's actually a piece of entertainment, not a military training simulator. *Dragon Rising* never once forgets that it's ultimately meant to be fun, but any issue of





How sickeningly heroic.



Some soldiers can make things explode using magic.

it being dumbed down can be dismissed by all but the most obsessive realism nuts. Indeed, it's actually difficult to see how this game will succeed on the consoles. Concessions are made to the use of pads – radial menus, checkpoints that revive your comrades, and so on – but if you're willing to look past these things, it's a difficult game.

This is a game that requires patience, a quality most console gamers, it's fair to say, don't have in abundance. This isn't just your PC snob talking here: *Dragon Rising* never really feels like it has been co-developed for any armchair gamer – whether on the PC or a console – unlike so many big-name games released nowadays. It's a great relief to be able to write those words as so often we're left pandering to the perhaps-unfair belief that console gamers can't handle anything remotely complex, having to suffer the lukewarm button-mashing tedium-fests that are sloppily ported over.

Also *Dragon Rising* doesn't crash (at least, it didn't for us). Even running on maximum graphics setting – one gripe

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Give me details on my performance, stat!

CAMPAIGN STATISTICS	
SGT. HUNTER	
Campaign	
General statistics relating to this campaign	
ENEMY KILLS	26
DEATHS	5
TEAM KILLS	0
SMALL ARMS ACCURACY	28%
SMALL ARMS BULLETS FIRED	162
SMALL ARMS BULLETS HIT	46
SMALL ARMS DEATHS	3
SMALL ARMS KILLS	15
GRENADES THROWN	2
GRENADE KILLS	0
BACK	

Everything you do in *Dragon Rising*, it seems, is recorded and accessible later on various different stats screens. Anything from the number of minutes you've spent in the commander's seat of a jeep or how many small arms kills you've got will show up, either in the specific mission you've just done or the campaign as a whole. Interesting in a perverse kind of a way, but mostly unnecessary and a bit pointless.



"It's not perfect... but as a game in its own right, it's a stormer"

would be the lack of advanced graphics settings to tweak – we never ran into any frame rate or performance issues. The graphics are good without being anything spectacular, so it should run well on the majority of reasonably specced machines.

The original *Operation Flashpoint* had a reasonable multiplayer element. While it wasn't great, it was fun for a while. It was also bollocking hard. *Dragon Rising's* take on this should be better. As we're playing the game before the game goes out on sale, nobody else has a copy of it, so trying out the multiplayer function is effectively out of the question. We'll take another look at it in a future issue, once the game is out on general release and the multiplayer servers are populated.

What we can tell you about is the campaign co-op. This is superb fun. We all know playing with other people is

great and *Dragon Rising* doesn't buck the excellence trend. It's pretty much exactly the same as the single-player experience, just with the added bonus of idiot human players mucking about.

QUALITY CONTROLLED

While *Arma II* had the potential to be superb *Dragon Rising* actually is, because it doesn't suffer from all the technical issues of the former game. Helicopters don't land on your head, they don't refuse to land if you do something a little out of the ordinary, and you don't have to chase important NPCs over several kilometres because they got spooked by a bit of gunfire. (All of which we've seen happen when we've played *Arma II*.)

The only problem you might have is an AI driver (of any vehicle) not having great pathfinding if you're in the commander's seat giving move orders. Usually they're fine, and this applies to

the single-player as well. But sometimes trees can confuse drivers a bit, so they ignore the plants and plough through.

Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising has achieved the singular feat of being a military simulator that's actually fun to play on more than just a "Look how much stuff is here!" way. Codemasters have remembered that the most important thing for a game to be is fun. At the end of the day, if your CO disintegrates for no reason and you can't proceed with the mission, it doesn't matter how accurate the spark plugs are on the vehicle you're driving, you'll get fed up and sack it off. What you want to do is be given an objective, go there and shoot some baddies, without any weirdness occurring.

Dragon Rising makes this activity challenging but always pleasurable. It might be helping you out a bit too much at times with its life-giving checkpoints and magic syringes, but sometimes a bit of assistance isn't a bad thing. Some people will doubtless hate it, saying it's not a par on *Arma II*, moaning about how it isn't realistic enough or that the PLA don't have accurate uniforms, but I advise you to ignore the naysayers and play the game. It's not perfect, there are

little problems and niggles that can be found if you look for them, but none of them spoil the game or ruin the playing experience.

This might not be the proper successor to the original *Operation Flashpoint*, but as a game in its own right, it's a stormer. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Good on the whole
SOUND Functional, never annoying
MULTIPLAYER Co-op great, rest potentially

- ✓ Great fun
- ✓ Hard but fair
- ✓ Co-op campaign
- ✓ More of a game than *Arma II*
- ✗ Some console touches

90

Operation Flashpoint: Sales Rising



"Right you two, kiss and make up."

What? Don't you trust me?



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Like his hero *David Brown* has a leathery hide and likes the dark

DEVELOPER Rocksteady Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE batmanarkham
asylum.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Batman goes up against the Joker and a whole host of other classic DC villains in this third-person action/adventure.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz processor Pentium 4 or AMD Athlon 64 3000+, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM	89%
X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME	59%
SPIDER-MAN 3	42%

A S A RULE of thumb, superhero games are, almost without exception, complete rubbish. We're talking the officially licensed ones here, not stuff like *Freedom Force* or *City of Heroes*. You know, ones that have often have "The Game" tacked on as a subtitle. Would *Batman: Arkham Asylum* have been as good if it was riding the back of a big movie license? We're not sure, but we're glad it isn't, because, freed from any restrictive release schedule, Rocksteady have been able to craft what is perhaps the greatest superhero game ever made.

You can stop mopping that brow, as the long months of worrying have come to an end. The game does have problems,

but this is a game that has been made by people who genuinely care about the source material and have taken great delight in cramming as much as they possibly can into a great game. There's hundreds of items to find and riddles to solve that perfectly complement the main game. There's the argument that the main game could be a little thin if you took out all the extraneous trappings, but we don't subscribe to that viewpoint.

The game starts with old Bats delivering the recaptured Joker to Arkham

Asylum – the Gothic mansion-turned-sanatorium where Gotham City's most ghostly and diabolical villains reside, all of whom harbour some sort of grudge against Batman. (Actually, it's mainly the same grudge – he beat them up and dropped them off in the madhouse.) Once at the Asylum, Joker is strapped to a gurney and wheeled along by some guards, Batman following close

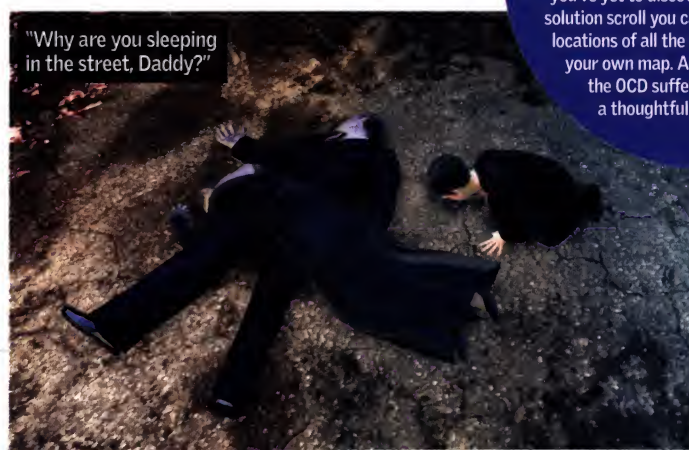
behind. As an initial setup to stoke up atmosphere, it works very well.

Of course, everything starts to go hideously wrong, Joker escapes and Batman is forced to make up for the inept Asylum security staff and save the day.

We won't spoil the plot from here on in, but it does take some twists and turns as it develops. Most importantly, it always feels like a proper Batman story, which, given that it was

RIDDLE ME THIS

Each area of the game has an info page where you can find out how many of the areas secrets you've uncovered. It'll tell you how many Joker Teeth you've destroyed (20 in each bit) and how many Riddler Trophies and conundrums you've yet to discover. Each area also has a solution scroll you can find, which marks the locations of all the hidden items for you on your own map. An infuriating extra for the OCD sufferers among us, but a thoughtful one all the same.



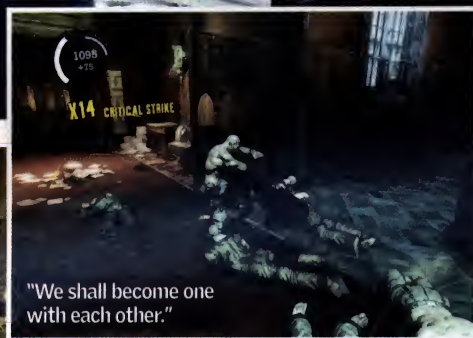
"Why are you sleeping in the street, Daddy?"



I got your scent, Batman. I will hunt you down.



"I've changed my mind...
I think I'll torture you."



"We shall become one
with each other."

Bruce Wayne or
Dick Grayson?

penned by Paul Dini of *Batman: The Animated Series* fame, isn't surprising at all. Above all, it's engrossing and makes you want to see what the next twist is.

Building an atmosphere around this storyline was perhaps the most important task the developers had to face, maybe even more so than the actual gameplay. In this they have undoubtedly succeeded, creating a rich, varied world for the player to explore.

The game is based on the Unreal Engine 3, so things can look a bit plastic

at times, but the Asylum's architecture is impressive, the levels are full of off-the-beaten-track areas to explore, and frame rates are consistently impressive, even when in the big outdoor areas or when playing on mediocre systems.

As for sound, this is perhaps the most impressive element. The voice talent for the game is excellent, with particular praise heading in Mark Hamill's direction for his superlative performance as the Joker. Batman is as dry and monotone as

ever, of course, and the villains certainly steal the show, as they've always done.

"But what about the game?" I hear you cry. This is where things get a little more complicated.

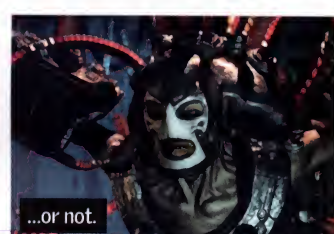
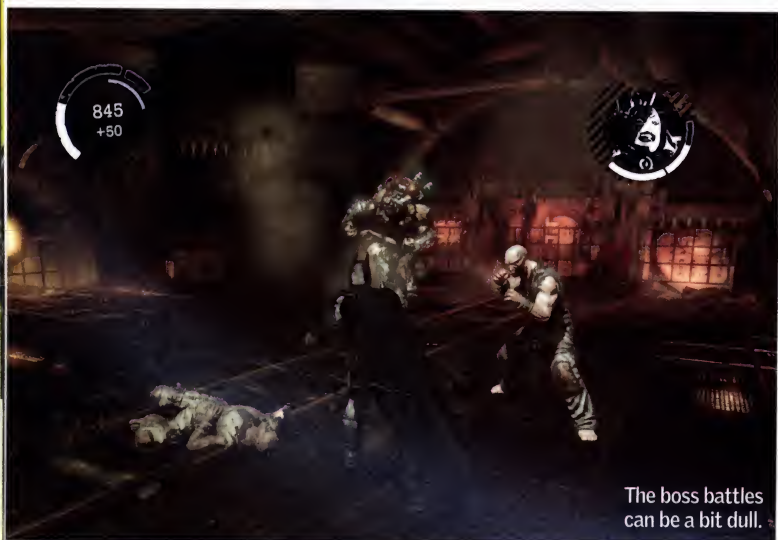
FLAWED GENIUS

The temptation is to look past the combat and focus purely on the storytelling and the main bulk of the game, but that would be doing you, the reader, a disservice.

Certainly, if a reviewer were only to play the early stages of the game, combat wouldn't really be a major issue for him or her to deal with. But once you start getting into the meat of the game, it does become a problem.

On paper, it must have looked great, though. It works in a similar way to *The Witcher's* melee system, as in it's all about timing your attacks to chain combos that do great





THE SCARECROW

Changing the viewpoint to change the tempo

Every so often, Batman will be hit by hallucinogenic gas, unleashed by the Scarecrow – a psychiatrist who became obsessed with fear. Apart from causing visions of Bats' dead parents, the game twists into a 2.5D Scarecrow realm.

A change of pace to the main game, these sections work surprisingly well. They're not jaw-dropping and can be a

little fiddly, but as a unique way of changing the tempo and offering the player a break from the regular action, they do the job.

The object is basically to avoid being spotted by the hulking Scarecrow, moving to the right and hiding behind cover. They're also not too long, so they don't get silly and boring.



damage. Get up to eight consecutive hits and you open up (once unlocked in the Upgrades section) throws and other extra moves.

The problem is that the animation gets in the way, especially when you're trying to block an attack. Sometimes Batman will leap to strike an enemy, but this animation will be so long that, even if you time a block effectively, you'll be struck. Later on, when you're facing massive groups of thugs all at once, this can get intensely frustrating.

There's definitely something to be said, just like in *The Witcher*, for attempting to time your clicks, but when things get frantic, it's sorely tempting to just hammer the left mouse button and hope for the best. Boss battles aren't much better either, with the usual arbitrary way of killing big monster trope in effect.

Really though, other than this there's not much wrong with the gameplay, and it's also important to note that this only affects the big – and rare – mob-style combat. When fighting smaller groups you can time your blocks and attacks more effectively and everything flows better.

There are also the numerous sections where you're advised to use stealth and cunning to pick off enemies. These are the best bits, combat-wise, with later situations requiring you to plan what the best way to eliminate the threat is.

The theory is that there are often multiple methods

available to achieve this goal, but it's an illusion of freedom. Yes, you can crawl under the floor gratings and take someone down from below, but often they just spot you before you have the chance. If you have the patience, spectacular room clearances can be achieved. Most of us will just settle for glide kicks and hanging from gargoyles and stringing thugs up by the feet.



ROGUE'S GALLERY

A Who's Who of ne'er-do-wells



SCARFACE

While the Joker and the Riddler are familiar foes, some – like the psychotic ventriloquist dummy (yes, really) Scarface – may be new to you.

HUSH

Thomas Elliott – aka Hush – is a surgeon who irrationally hates Bruce Wayne. He knows Wayne is Batman, and worked with the Riddler in an attempt to kill him.

KILLER CROC

Originally a crime lord afflicted with atavism, Croc has devolved into a murderous reptile-man, with a fondness for eating people.

CLAYFACE

Once a disfigured actor, Clayface used a flesh-moulding moisturiser to make himself handsome. Until he took too much. Now he's an insane shape-shifter who can turn into anything he wants.

"This is a work of love, dedication and great skill"

The gameplay also feels perfectly at home on the PC. Pleasingly, you don't have to shove the mouse sensitivity up to extreme levels because the game was designed solely with pads in mind. There's also no "Press Right Trigger to perform this action" nonsense when using the mouse and keys either. Everything feels smooth and natural, enabling you to zip about from ledge to ledge with impressive fluidity. This is crucially important, because one of the most enjoyable parts of the game is completing the Riddler's challenges.

There are number of extra-curricular activities to partake of in *Arkham Asylum*, most of which involve the tried-

and-tested-to-boredom idea of collecting tokens that lie about in hidden and not-so-well-hidden places. For some reason that I can't fully explain, I thoroughly enjoyed hunting down all the Riddler trophies (small green question marks) that litter each area of the game.

As well as these, there are audio logs referring to various villains and the creator of the asylum – Amadeus Arkham – which help those who aren't knowledge about Bat lore better understand what's going on.

Scuttling Joker teeth can be destroyed as another of these ongoing tasks, granting experience which can be used to unlock new abilities, like more

special moves. Lastly, and most importantly, we have the Riddles.

Each area is packed with little puzzles to solve that add immeasurably to the game. A clue in green will appear on the screen when you enter a new area and, using the Detective mode (Batman can use this to decipher clues, follow trails and detect heat signatures, Predator-style) take a snapshot of the solution. They usually take two forms – snapping an object of scenery, like a portrait on a wall, or getting in the right position to line up the dot with the rest of a question mark.

Essentially, I can't be much more enthusiastic about them. Suffice it to say, the game would be a much lesser experience without these Riddles.

GOING BATTY

There's no real comparison between this and any other licensed superhero game. It's actually an insult to compare them at all, so vastly different are they in scope and imagination. *Arkham Asylum* is a work of love, dedication and great skill. You'll be able to tell this from just a short of amount of time. There are problems, sure, issues that keep it from being a true classic (only just).

There's the issues with combat, plus the fact too many areas have to be travelled through on more than one occasion, leading to repetition and resentment. There's also the annoying little quirk that some puzzles and riddles cannot be solved until you have an item delivered later in the game, meaning you can easily spend ages wondering how to

get that troublesome Riddler trophy, only to realise later that you were never meant to be able to at that time.

Despite these niggles, it is safe to say this is almost certainly the best superhero game ever released. Certainly it's the best one this reviewer has played.

While *Batman: Arkham Asylum* missed out on our coveted Classic status, it was a difficult decision to make. If the combat had been a bit more sophisticated in the latter stages of the game, it'd have been a nailed-on Classic. As it is, it'll just have to settle for being recommended as a damn fine game that you really should play. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS A tad plasticity but very good

SOUND Superb voice acting
MULTIPLAYER Bats is on his lonesome

- ✓ Authentic Batman
- ✓ Loads to see and do
- ✓ Great acting and atmosphere
- ✗ Combat doesn't always work
- ✗ Repetition of some areas

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Holy Great Game, Batman!

"Peek-a-boo, I see you!"



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

Nick Brakespear shifts into reverse instead of fifth

DEVELOPER Slightly Mad
PUBLISHER EA Games
WEBSITE shift.needforspeed.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Flash cars, visuals and gameplay, and that old *Need For Speed* emphasis on style over substance.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 1.6GHz dual core processor, 1GB RAM
 (1.5GB *Vista*), and a 256MB graphics
 card with Pixel Shader 3.0.

HOW IT STACKS

GTR2 **92%**

RACE DRIVER:
 GRID **88%**

NEED FOR
 SPEED: SHIFT **84%**

WHEN LEARNING HOW to drive, there are things that put your driving instructor a little on edge. Proudly discussing the many hours you've spent speeding around virtual tracks is one of them.

As much as you'll hate me for destroying your dreams, apparently "trading paint" isn't something to aim for, drifting is not acceptable behaviour when driving to Tewkesbury, and revving the guts out of your Fiesta as you wait for the lights to change will not result in

a perfect launch and propel you to victory. Depressing, isn't it?

To further confuse you and convince you that power slides are a good idea, along comes *Need For Speed: Shift*. The latest in a long line of games dating back to the early '90s, *Shift* marks a supposed radical change in the franchise, pushing aside *The Fast* and *The Furious*-style street racing in favour of realistic real-world tracks. As such, if you're of the opinion that your brain is likely to melt and dribble out through your nostrils at

the thought of races without jumps, police or loud music proclaiming the benefits of "bitches" and "bling", you might want to hold a bowl beneath your chin for the remainder of this review.

That being said, while *Shift*'s central concept and aim is somewhat different to the badassery of previous *NFS* titles, it hasn't been left entirely untouched by its predecessors.

LOVING FEELING

"But how does it feel?" you might be asking, like somebody whose friend has just stuck their hand in a pot of poo. I can tell you with great certainty that it feels good.

After a prolonged absence from the series, the driver's seat view returns with great aplomb, adding a fantastic level of detail and immersion to the proceedings, and somehow further emphasising the weight and power of whatever vehicle you're driving. On the highest realism settings, simply keeping all four wheels





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AREN'T YOU CLEVER?

Shift rewards your every move



In conjunction with the cash you'll amass throughout the single-player career, the game rewards you with 'profile points' for just about everything you do during a race. These mini achievements fall into two categories: Precision and Aggression. Trading paint as you overtake another racer, or simply smashing them off the track will count as aggression; while, funnily enough, sliding through the race

without crashing into anything will count towards precision. Depending on your driving style, you'll be awarded with a little Precision or Aggression badge. There's no right or wrong, and you'll be rewarded for whatever you do, so long as you do it well. Rewards include the usual unlockables, sponsorship deals, or invitations to special race events outside the tournament.



"Shift's aim is different to the badassery of previous NFS titles"

on the track is challenging, yet this is a matter of skill rather than dodgy physics. On that note, the physics have received a lick of paint too since last we ventured into the *NFS* franchise. Should your car slide over the edge of the track and onto the grass or gravel, you'll notice with satisfaction (or panic) that the rough terrain is dragging those two wheels slightly, and your vehicle is beginning to tug in that direction. Should you then crash, you'll feel it, and you'll sympathise with your poor, abused

avatar as he grunts and the screen jolts into a monochrome haze. Sadly, smashing head first into a wall will not result in a first-person *Flatout*-style ragdoll dive through the windscreen.

TARMAC JOY
To put it simply, perhaps one of the most important things in a driving game is that it captures that connection between driver and road. You should be able to sense the road surface through the vehicle, even without force feedback.



This is something that *Shift* has long been boasting that it would do, and it has succeeded. Unfortunately, and in spite of the game's engrossing core gameplay, there are issues that may turn those looking for a deeper experience off. Firstly, the career mode is simply too forgiving. Cock up a race, and you can restart it. Decide that a track is driving you right up the wall, and you can come back to it later. The rewards, too, are more than generous and it's unlikely that you'll find yourself short of cash, as damage to your car isn't persistent and there's no simulation of repair times and costs. Similarly, crashing isn't nearly as serious as the visuals suggest. Try as I might I failed to total the vehicle. *Shift's* overall presentation is smooth, but tainted by a console-esque lack of mouse support on the menus, an excess of flashy but redundant screens, unskippable cutscenes and a general sense that, for better or for worse, this is still very much *Need For Speed*.

All in all, this is a highly enjoyable racing game with a lot of polish and it's good to see the franchise try a little harder. However, serious Racers will be put off unless they're fans of the *Need For Speed* vibe. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Flashy cars
SOUND Growling engines
MULTIPLAYER Yes

- ✓ Fantastic driver's view
- ✓ Solid physics
- ✓ Lots of cars
- ✗ A bit shallow
- ✗ Too forgiving

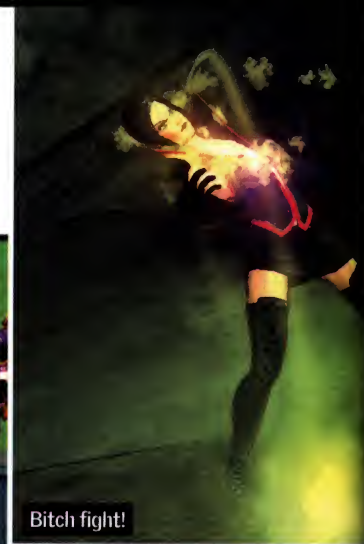
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Fourth gear

"These new contacts aren't working right. Ow."



Bitch fight!



CHAMPIONS ONLINE

Dressing in cleavage-revealing attire, *Paul Presley* retcons his origin

DEVELOPER Cryptic Studios
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE champions-online.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99 (£8.99 monthly subscription)

AT A GLANCE...

Superheroes running around a city battling aliens and mutants. It's *City Of Heroes* take two.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2.5GHz or 1.8GHz Dual Core
 processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce
 7600/ATI Radeon x700.

HOW IT STACKS

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 89%

CITY OF HEROES 77%

CHAMPIONS ONLINE 64%

THERE AREN'T MANY games in which I can witness an NPC utter the words "Thank God!"

I feel much safer now that Beatrix is here!" *Champions Online*, and maybe the next *Tomb Raider*, that's about it. But it's a fine example of the sort of attention to the small details that the team at Cryptic Studios has paid with its second blast at the superhero MMO genre.

Whether it's NPCs praising your prowess as you fly past, mission text and elements filled with humorous references to modern pop culture (including nearly the entire cast of *Lost*), letting players send Twitter messages and updates from within the game, or the ability to

choose the colour of your energy bolts and whether they fire from your head, palm or tits, Cryptic have not so much gone to town by filling *Champions Online* with any idea it can think of, as taken a degree in advanced town planning, built every road themselves, and then shagged every fertile woman they could find to populate the locale. You literally cannot move more than a few feet in *Champions Online* without seeing some testament to creative, blue-sky game feature development.

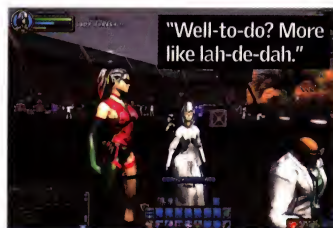
The only problem is that somewhere along the line, they appear to have forgotten to put any work into creating the actual game to tie it all together.

BLAMO!

Champions' biggest problem is that it lacks any sense of depth. It's one of the most surface-y MMOs I've ever played. Whereas most of these virtual worlds try to offer some sense of progression choice for your characters, in *Champions Online*, no matter what type of hero emerges from the much talked about (and rightly

lauded) character creation system, you're going to be doing exactly the same things, in exactly the same ways, each and every time. This goes right down to the over-long and unskippable tutorial zone that, while fine first time round, is a massive pain in the utility belt by your third and fourth time through. This has the unfortunate side-effect of putting you off using the impressive character creator, as you know the pain you'll eventually have to go through once you're done with it.

The basic combat mechanic, the skill or level progression paths, the mission arcs – attempt them with more than one character and you rapidly discover you're not so much exploring a world of superheroes, as working your way through an identical checklist of generic MMO goals each time. Other than the surface visuals, nothing about *Champions Online's* structure suggests that it started out as a superhero game for multiple players, instead coming across as a completely standard MMO template hiding underneath a glossy superhero





This guy never liked *The Golden Girls*.



GOLDEN SHOWERS

Incidentally, I was going to create an entire crime-fighting team based around *The Golden Girls*, but got as far as Bat-ty White and the decrepit one's daughter before hitting a brick wall.

Anyone know any good superhero naming puns for Rue McClanahan?



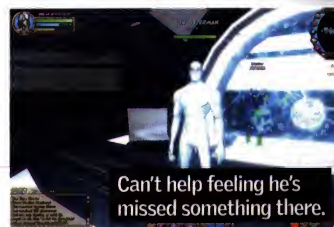
paint job. There are precious few moments when you ever feel like you're being given a classic comic book experience. Seriously, when have you ever heard of superheroes buying new powers in a shop?

POWSOCKO!

Annoyingly, *Champions Online* offers many glimpses of actual fun, notably when powering through the grind with

a bunch of friends (although that can be said of any multiplayer experience). If you look past all the complaints about it not being a superhero MMO and accept it for just being a colourful, basic blast-heavy combat environment, you can have a nice enough time.

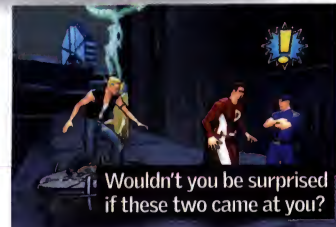
But be warned, that novelty is going to wear off rapidly once you reach the late teens, and realise you're in for a seriously grind-heavy experience with



no hint of any high-end game that offers a goal to reach for.

And the ideas do show promise that there's a better game in here somewhere. Removing the notion of kill-stealing, eliminating spawn camps, encouraging players to just jump into someone else's fight with no penalty to either participant is a stroke of genius.

But it's hard to see that underlying structure of the game changing at all though, so unless you read about some serious patching a few months down the line on Cryptic's message boards, the best advice we can give for those tempted to try *Champions Online* is to treat it as a diversion until we've seen if *DC Universe Online* can offer better and more substantial superheroic thrills, or just stick with *City of Heroes*. **PCZ**



PCZONE

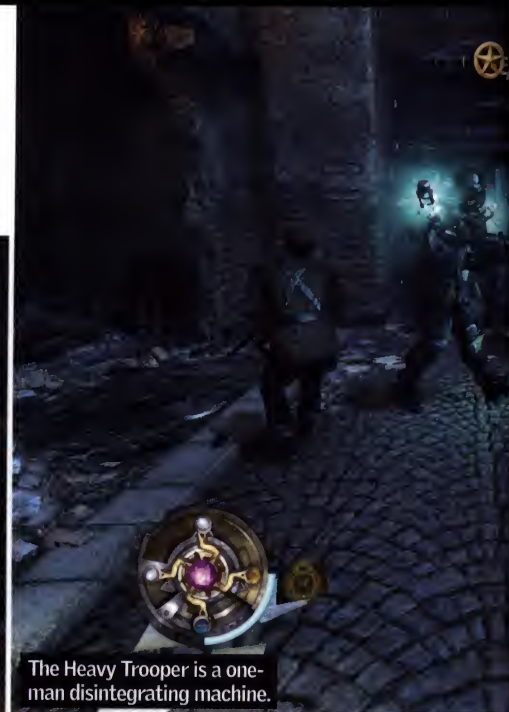
GRAPHICS Colourful and campy
SOUND Audio versions of BLAM!
MULTIPLAYER Well, duh

- ✓ Character Creator
- ✓ Lots of great ideas
- ✗ Lacking a coherent structure
- ✗ Extremely repetitive
- ✗ No variety outside costume

64

Clooney-era Batman

Enemies aren't great at taking cover.



The Heavy Trooper is a one-man disintegrating machine.

WOLFENSTEIN

B.J. gets new powers, but *Jonathan Todd* finds them a bit dull

DEVELOPER Raven Software/
Endrants Studios
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE wolfenstein.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

B.J. Blazkowicz finally returns to battle yet more supernatural-obsessed Nazis.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3.2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and
a GeForce 6800 GT.

HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY:
WORLD AT WAR 84%

WOLFENSTEIN 69%

TURNING POINT:
FALL OF LIBERTY 59%

NOT A LOT has changed over the years. B.J. Blazkowicz is off nobbling Nazis who're obsessed with harnessing the supernatural, and gamers are still being given the same old schtick 17 years after *Wolfenstein 3D* transformed first-person shooters.

Of course there's nothing wrong with the corny story, terrible accents and occult trappings when they're such a huge part of *Wolfenstein's* enduring charm. The major problem with this latest reboot is we've seen it all before and done better, most notably in 2001's *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. Yes, a game

from eight years ago. This year's *Wolfenstein* tries to introduce a few new ideas, but they're executed so halfheartedly it's almost painful.

A RIGHT MISFIRE

Take the supposed open-world feature: being able to sneak around a German town dodging Nazis and collecting main missions and side missions from various Resistance fighters while operating on the black market to upgrade your arsenal. While it sounds good, this just amounts to wandering around a maze of boring and largely deserted streets, occasionally stumbling across a handful of dozy enemies before getting linear missions from bland characters and buying weapon upgrades that you don't really need. This illusion of freedom really

starts to grate after a few boring trips back and forth to your safe house.

The supernatural element plays a more prominent role than ever before, to the extent where you can now wield some powers yourself using a MacGuffin called the Thule Medallion and its Veil powers. Again, what should have been a great excuse for developer Raven to really go wild with some crazy supernatural stuff ends up as bullet-time, a shield and a damage buff. Cheers chaps. Now you can upgrade them so B.J. can move in real-time while everything else is slowed down, or make the shield disintegrate enemies, but it's hard not to feel very disappointed at what might have been.

The Veil is another dimension, which sounds exciting and mysterious, but actually turns out to be a greeny blue

Blast the weak spots highlighted in red.



"Long-time fans will be pretty appalled by this effort"

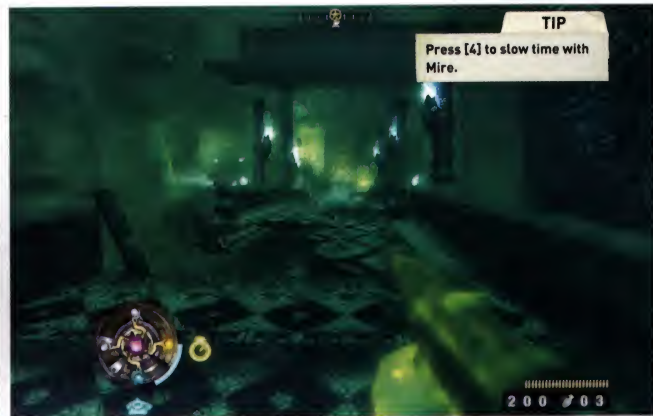


POWER UP

Puzzles highlight the Veil powers' wasted potential

Although it feels like the Veil powers were created on the back of a fag packet in two minutes, there are some good moments scattered here and there that show what might have been. You'll need to use the Medallion to get past some of the game's

puzzles, which include moving walls, collapsing floors and walls that shoot spiked balls at you. It's all very Indiana Jones, and makes you wish there were more puzzles and traps like them throughout the game.



filter that uncovers hidden doors and shows enemies taking cover in darkness. One step up from heat-seeking goggles then. The Veil also highlights enemies' weak spots, which comes in handy during the surprisingly decent boss battles against über soldiers and the like.

Despite the game doing its best to be underwhelming, there's still a lot of fun to be had with it. Killing Nazis is undeniably entertaining – as it is always – and now there are even more ways to do the goose-steppers in. The game helpfully keeps a tally of how many you've dismembered, burned, electrocuted and dissolved, although we got a real kick just out of watching them clutch their throats

and gargle while blood gushed out. The Veil powers may not be up to much, but there are touches such as when gravity gets messed up and you get to shoot hapless Nazis spinning in the air.

TACKY MP

The single-player campaign lasts about seven hours, but if you're looking for multiplayer to add replay value then you'll be left frustrated. While there are a healthy number of players to be found admirably plugging away at it, 2009's *Wolfenstein*'s looks and plays worse than *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. There are only three game types and three classes, and it's laggy and feels so slow to boot.

You can tell it's been cobbled together by a different development team because it feels tacked on.

Where once the *Wolfenstein* name guaranteed excitement and originality, now the best it can give is undemanding fun. There's nothing wrong with that, but the usual spark and flair has deserted this game and it's seriously lagging behind rival first-person shooters such as *Call of Duty: World at War*.

If you're a newcomer to the series you'll wonder what all the fuss is about when you've heard gamers bang on about *Wolfenstein* being a classic, while long-time fans will be pretty appalled by this effort. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS The id Tech 4 engine holds up

SOUND Comedy 'Allo 'Allo accents

MULTIPLAYER Slow, boring, lacks depth

- ✓ Always fun, never frustrating
- ✓ Some good boss battles
- ✓ Blood-gurgling neck shots
- ✗ It isn't open-world
- ✗ Veil powers are unoriginal
- ✗ The AI can be dense

69

Undemanding



RISEN

Nick Brakespear rises to the occasion

DEVELOPER Piranha Bytes
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE risen.deepsilver.com
ETA 2 October
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

An immersive and enjoyable island-based RPG with a hint of *Lost*, from the makers of *Gothic*.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION 95%
RISEN 85%
GOTHIC 85%

HAVING SPENT A considerable amount of effort collecting every herb and mushroom I could find, I must confess that I began to question my sanity. The giant vultures, porcupines and killer butterflies that harassed me as I made my way across the island suddenly seemed a little suspicious.

Were they merely hallucinations? Or perhaps, in a twist akin to something out of *Lost*, the mysterious island was manifesting my fears as deranged mutant fauna. No, I haven't been indulging in herbal remedies while on holiday, but rather I have been indulging in a bit of *Risen*, the latest offering from *Gothic* developer, Piranha Bytes.

Waking up shipwrecked on a tropical beach, you're immediately thrown into a world of jungles, temples, caves and other assorted fantasy locales, tasked

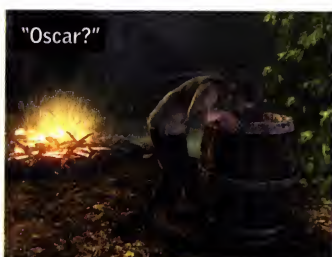
with figuring out where the hell you are and where you can find something sharp to stab the various things that want to kill you, eat you, or eat you and then kill you.

As stories go, this isn't far from original, featuring as it does the usual world-threatening ancient evil rising from the depths to, you know, threaten the world, but the tropical nature of the island is something that we don't see often in the genre. And the island is very, very pretty, with dense jungles, active wildlife and beautifully detailed beaches.

ISLAND LIFE

Like many of these strange European RPGs, the detail doesn't end with the visuals. There are a wide variety of plants to collect and mix potions with, meats to cook with and booze to consume, and a multitude of non-combat skills to appease fans of the survivalist side of RPGs.

The AI meanwhile, though not boasting the complex behavioural patterns of *Oblivion* or *Fallout 3*, shows enough life to trick you into thinking that they're not just brainless lines of scripting, with enemies going as far as to loot your corpse, or eat it, should you balls things up and die.



On that note, the combat is functional and smooth, though not the most complex experience, and weapons feel satisfyingly heavy.

All in all, there's little to find fault with here unless you have a grudge against the *Gothic* series, or the occasionally naff voiceovers inherent to such games. *Risen* is a solid, engrossing and beautifully presented RPG that's well worth your time and money. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Just lovely
SOUND Rich and varied
MULTIPLAYER No

- ✓ Vibrant visuals
- ✓ Solid gameplay
- ✓ Detailed world
- ✓ Island setting
- ✗ Some bad voice acting
- ✗ Unoriginal premise

85
Message in a bottle



HYSTERIA HOSPITAL EMERGENCY WARD

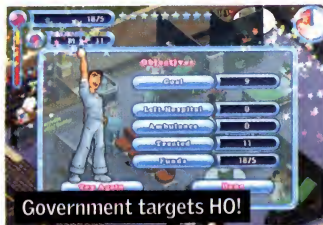
You give me fever

DEVELOPER GAMEINVEST
PUBLISHER Oxygen Games
WEBSITE oxygengames.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

HOSPITAL WAITING ROOMS freak me out. Perhaps I'm being a bit Howard Hughes, but they're full of sick people. I can't even sit in my GP's waiting room without holding my breath for as long as possible, or masking my mouth and nose with my T-shirt. Diseased people go there. And they keep breathing on everything. And they touch things too.

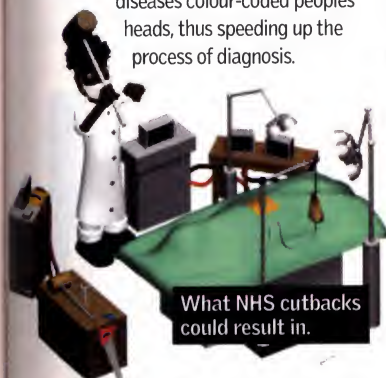
Anyway, perhaps the NHS would be cleaner and more efficient, and our American friends less terrified of government-run health services, if government targets were like the goals in *Hysteria Hospital*. Made it through the day without killing a patient? Then strike the air with your first as sparkly stars rain upon you! Maybe medical staff would be more enthusiastic about their jobs if each 'day' was referred to as a 'level'. Of course it might also help if diseases colour-coded peoples' heads, thus speeding up the process of diagnosis.



That said, if hospitals were like *Hysteria Hospital* then all the staff would develop back problems from dragging patients around by the head all day, and then commit suicide having realised that their life had become a series of ever more complicated, yet fundamentally identical, levels with no end in sight, and no purpose beyond the acquisition of high scores.

As if such a life wasn't enough, they'd probably also despair over the fact that the whole world was a badly-animated 2D facsimile.

Nick Brakespear

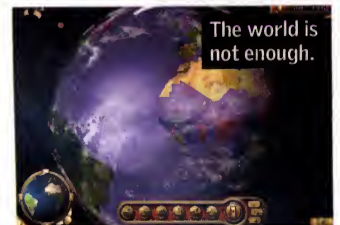


WAR LEADERS: CLASH OF NATIONS

Leading the charge

DEVELOPER Enigma Software Productions
PUBLISHER V2 Play
WEBSITE warleaders-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

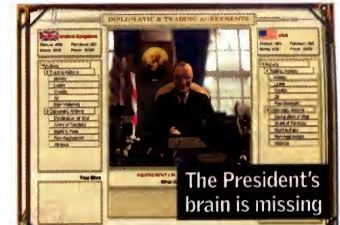
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.



SOMETIMES BABIES ARE ugly. Try as you might to see some inner beauty, there are ugly infants out there. I'm sure that they're full of potential and they'll grow into beautiful people if fed properly, but right here and now they're a snotty, weird looking baby.

You want to love it, you want to smile at it, but those eyes are starting to freak you out and you end up sort of staring back like it's daring you to look away. Except you can't look away because then the mother will notice that you're avoiding eye contact with her offspring and she'll be offended.

War Leaders is a WWII RTS featuring a turn-based *Total War*-style campaign map and seven playable factions. Like the ugly baby scenario, there's a lot of potential here. The open-ended campaign structure allows the player to change the course of history and declare war on any nation they wish, and the presence of war leaders as units on the map means that



assassination is both a threat and a tactical opportunity.

When units clash on the campaign map, the game shifts to a real-time battlefield. The battles are tactical, with diverse scenery and the inclusion of naval barrages from ships visible off the coast, but all of these solid features are marred by the game's ugliness.

Lengthy load times, dated visuals, an obtuse interface and an unnecessarily decentralised recruitment system are some of the many features that'll have you eyeing this game with suspicion.

Nick Brakespear





DELTA FORCE XTREME 2

Nostalgia gone wrong

DEVELOPER NovaLogic
PUBLISHER NovaLogic
WEBSITE novaLogic.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £21.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Pentium 4 processor, 1GB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

P EOPLE DERIDED NOVALOGIC for their quaint insistence on using voxel-based engines back in the day, but I always thought the end result was rather cosy and cute. It was like walking through a world made of LEGO bricks. And of course, those cute little volumetric pixels were useful back then for rendering long, dense grass. Besides, voxel sounds better than pixel, like it was dreamt up by a SHODAN-esque supercomputer in a lab somewhere. Pixel sounds like a term for pixie poop.

The lack of voxels is perhaps to blame for this husk of a game. Perhaps when NovaLogic decided to tear the voxels from the *Delta Force* franchise, its soul was torn away with them. Whatever the cause, this void is noticeable and all that remains is a thin, bitter shell of stilted gameplay, poor visuals, simple AI, a single-player mode that now feels rather aimless, and a multiplayer that very few people seem to be bothering with.

Weighing it up fairly and without a burning hatred for those who took away



our beloved voxels, there are a few pleasing features, of course. There's a decent selection of weapons and vehicles, a co-op mode for the multiplayer, and the occasional mission featuring a 'jump from the helicopter' deployment. However all of these things become nothing more than candles guttering out at the bottom of a deep, dark cave when placed into the greater context of NPCs and vehicles getting stuck, helicopter crews inexplicably skydiving at the start of missions, and a general lack of polish that makes me wonder if NovaLogic even care about the games they make any more.

Nick Brakespear



HEROES OVER EUROPE

Dogfighting is fun again

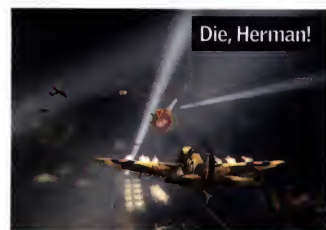
DEVELOPER Transmission Games
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE heroesovereurope.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.66GHz Processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a Radeon X1600 or Geforce 6800 with Shader model 3.0.

I F YOU'RE ANYTHING like me then you'll appreciate that there are times when the intricacies of flight simulations begin to test your patience. "When do I get to shoot something?" you cry, as 20 minutes pass and you're still flying in an empty sky. And then a speck appears, far away. And then you die.

All you wanted to do was fly very fast, pull the trigger and watch something go boom, and now you're being forced to start again? You barely made it off the airstrip in the first place. But fret not, for *Heroes Over Europe* has arrived, swooping in beneath the radar and strafing us with its cool defiance of realism.

Like *HAWX*, *Heroes Over Europe* flies by the laws of awesome. Everybody knows that diving vertically towards an enemy is awesome, and thus the game rewards you for doing it, increasing your damage. Flying as close as you can behind an enemy is also awesome, and thus doing so offers you a chance to enter into a 'focused' state where you can line up a perfect shot and acquire an instant 'Ace' kill.



From the white cliffs of Dover, through the blackened clouds of a beleaguered London, to the green fields and mountains of mainland Europe, you'll fight against an impressive number of enemies making them all go boom. With varied objectives, frenetic dogfights and radio banter that never annoys, *Heroes Over Europe* provides a simple, but pleasing action experience, with a refreshingly polished veneer.

Nick Brakespear





MATA HARI

Spying doesn't get any more boring

DEVELOPER 4Head Studios
PUBLISHER Viva Media
WEBSITE matahari-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

AFTER FINISHING WRITING the first draft of this review, I decided to check around the Internet to see if I'd missed anything glaringly obvious that might change the way I looked at *Mata Hari*.

Nothing did, but I did discover one observant forum poster who'd declared the intro sequence to be "devastatingly dull." Deciding I couldn't put it any better myself, I rewrote the intro to include this succinct description. So, there you have it. *Mata Hari* is "devastatingly dull".

For a while, at least. Things do get better when you leave the atrocious first scene and actually start doing more than talking about the weather with cardboard characters. But not much. The most soul-destroying thing



about the game is that it's been designed by Hal Barwood and Noah Falstein, both instrumental in the creation of the seminal *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*, which is just leagues ahead of this turgid offering.

It's a shame, as the backdrops are nicely drawn, the whole Edwardian spying idea has great potential, but the execution is uninspired. There's nothing woeful about the game, just that it lacks any quality. Locations, though pleasant to look at, have barely anything to interact with, and when you do have to perform some kind of puzzle-solving task, it's usually drab and uninteresting.

The lead character is boring, as are all the others, and the voice acting is delivered with little-to-no enthusiasm. There are also some mini-games, which aren't worth commenting on (especially as you can skip them).

There's little point bothering with *Mata Hari*, unless you're looking to sedate an relative and lack Rohypnol.

David Brown



TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND: SIEGE OF SPINNER CAY

A new yarn or money for old rope?

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/monkeyisland
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99 (for all five episodes)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

FOR THOSE WHO haven't taken the simian plunge, *Spinner Cay* is basically exactly the same as the series' first episode, *Launch of the Screaming Narwhal*. It's also a little bit better, with no porcelain power pirates to embarrass us, or vast swathes of time spent navigating dull jungle terrain. Well, there is a boring jungle bit, but it's smaller than before. And the ending suggests there's no chance of another cropping in the third episode.

Guybrush isn't stuck on one island either, though only two of them have more than one area to explore. In some ways *Spinner Cay* feels smaller than *Screaming Narwhal*, strangely. There's also the question of whether the new race – the Merfolk – work or not. They certainly don't add anything to the comedy side of things – apart from a book devoted to fish jokes – although this is almost entirely made up for by



the return of LeChuck. Teeth might be gnashing about his (surely temporary) transformation, but he's easily the best of the non-Guybrush characters.

The same problems that plagued the first episode are still present here, just diluted a little bit. Character models have still been reused a lot, but at least there are few new ones in there.

It might seem as if all I've done is slate *Siege of Spinner Cay*, but there's still a lot of goodness here. Guybrush is still such a fantastic character that weaker elements don't seem to matter when he's around. The puzzles are solid enough too.

So, while greatness might not have been attained yet, there's evidence to suggest Telltale are working hard enough on the flaws that it could still happen. Fingers crossed.

David Brown





FARM SIMULATOR 2009

Salt of the earth?

DEVELOPER 3 Giants
PUBLISHER Astragon
WEBSITE excalibur-publishing.co.uk/farmingsim2009.htm
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a Geforce 6800 or Radeon X850.

I DROVE A tractor once. It had a gear stick with two gears: one marked with a tortoise, the other with a hare. Being the hardcore rebel that I am, I decided to take it to the max and make it x-treme, so I put it in hare.

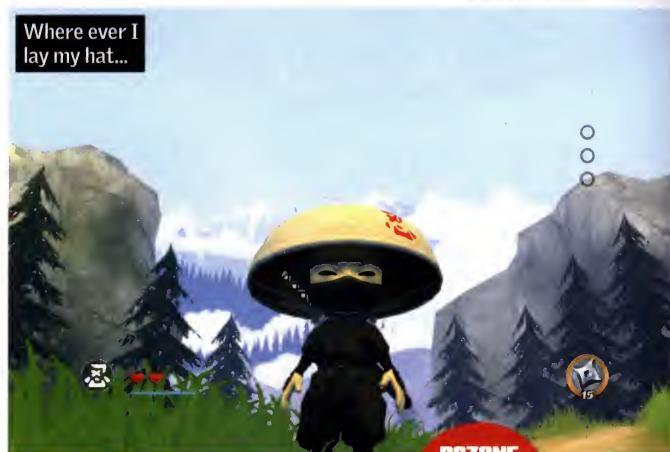
Such was the hardcore x-tremeness of the acceleration, such was the force behind this beast of a machine, that I barely noticed a difference in velocity. It was clearly so fast that my own perception of space and time had been warped, and the whole world seemed to slow to a crawl. It's moments like these that truly define us, and looking back I realise how close I came to death there upon the very edge of the max.



And in that context I give you *Farming Simulator 2009*, a truly x-treme piece of software. Be warned that such x-tremeness is extremely dangerous, and that those unprepared for such a hardcore experience may suffer whiplash. Driving tractors, ploughing fields, even harvesting your crops! This game takes you all the way to the agricultural edge, and then it pushes you, gives you a little nudge before grabbing you and smugly saying, "saved your life".

Cinematic thrills aside, however, it never goes too far by including such dangerous ideas as NPC interaction, building, research, upgradeable skills, the ability to customise your farmhouse, or elements of a wider economic simulation. And don't worry about hiding it from your children; the corrupting influences of livestock are thankfully absent, so there's no chance of your child virtually bugging a sheep or staring at a horse's bits.

Nick Brakespear



MINI NINJAS

I need a Hiro

DEVELOPER IO Interactive
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE minininjas.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 or Radeon X1300 with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.



F ROM THE MINDS that brought you people bursting into flames and falling into a tank full of sharks in *Hitman: Blood Money*, comes a game about fuedal Japanese assassins. Yet there are no prostitutes, drugs, strangulation or pyrotechnic shark attacks in *Mini Ninjas*, for this is a family title. This is a world where the bodies of your victims disappear in a magical cloud, leaving behind small fuzzy animals that merrily hop away into a cartoon landscape.

Set in a mystical Japanese world of samurai, ninja and talking bird people, *Mini Ninjas* tells the tale of Hiro, a relatively diminutive ninja, as he sets off on an epic quest to defeat a bald-headed villain who transforms cute little animals into evil minions. (And no, his name isn't Robotnik.)

Bouncing through the world, Hiro learns new tricks and magical powers, concocts potions, engages in rudimentary hide-in-the-bush stealth gameplay and fights the usual array of lesser enemies and bosses. It's all very cute and jolly, but there is a distinct lack of depth or wit behind the cuteness, and so little to keep older gamers occupied for long.



The visuals are a little dated too, and might have looked more impressive with some cel-shading effects, rather than the fairly basic 3D on show.

The biggest flaw however, for a game whose story revolves around a team of ninjas, is its distinct lack of a co-op multiplayer mode. Even Sonic had Tails to play with, but here each ninja must fight alone, and so Hiro must magically swap places with one of his allies rather than summon them to stand beside him.

This is a simple game for simpler minds.

Nick Brakespear



Rule as all-powerful, El Presidente as you decide whether to turn your tropical island into a vacation paradise, a prosperous industrial nation or jail the masses in your Banana Republic!

New campaign mode, scenarios and online capabilities take this award-winning, strategy/sim game to a whole new level. Don't forget, take care of your people or they will take care of you!

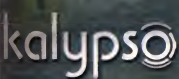
TROPICO 3

**EL PRESIDENTE IS BACK
ON PC AND XBOX 360!**



**TROPICO RELOADED
OUT NOW!**

**ARRIVAL
TROPICO ISLAND,
OCTOBER 2009**



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WWW.TROPICO3.COM

Budget

Adam Glick and Nick Brakespear writhe about in the love juices of cheap games

FALLOUT COLLECTION

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

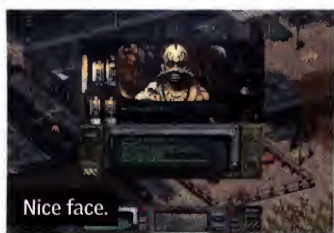
PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE store.steampowered.com PRICE £15.99

LONG BEFORE THE pixel shading and HDR of *Fallout 3*, long before the nostalgic art deco world of *BioShock*, the Ink Spots accompanied the black-and-white footage of *Fallout*'s atmospheric intro movie. As we watched government propaganda and advertising for nuclear bunkers, a crackling recording

of *Maybe* quietly and effortlessly established a feeling that would define an entire franchise.

Set in the post-apocalyptic wastes of what was once the '50s USA, the *Fallout* series sees the player travelling around a largely open (and incredibly hostile) world full of mutants, slavers, radiation and suspicious beverages. Combat is turn-based fashion and uses action points and an aiming system that would later become the V.A.T.S. of *Fallout 3*. To this day it remains as hard as a brick wrapped in concrete.

With its darkly comical tone and tendency to be as foul-mouthed and sexually active as a guest on *Jerry*



Springer, *Fallout* is one of those cult classics that you should have played. The collection on offer here includes the original and *Fallout 2*, and the combat oriented spin-off, *Fallout Tactics*.

PCZONE
80
Radiation day

THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...



David lounged about at home for a week.
SAVING £68

Steve got others to spend oodles of cash on him while in Cologne.
SAVING £312.23



Richard failed to save any money whatsoever.
SAVING -£175



BARROW HILL: CURSE OF THE ANCIENT CIRCLE

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.78

EEK, A FLICK-SCREEN adventure game. Argh, a flick-screen adventure game that has low-res graphics. Yuck, a flick-screen adventure game that has absolutely atrocious voice acting.

Egads, a flick-screen adventure game that tries to be scary, but isn't, despite a

branding from the Beeb on the box saying it's "the next best thing to sleeping in a haunted house".

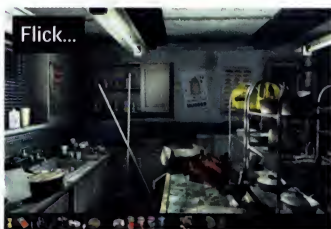
Erk, it's a flick-screen adventure game with a scared motel/garage manager who moves using a grand total of three frames of animation.

Cripes, a flick-screen adventure with less charm than a Nazi uniform-clad Mr Blobby.

Crivens, a flick-screen adventure where you have to complete a vast array of silly logic puzzles that spoil all flow and ruin all atmosphere.

Lawks, a flick-screen adventure that's nothing but average, with woeful production values and nothing but boredom awaiting the unsuspecting buyer.

Blimey, this joke might have worn a bit thin. Jiminy, I'd better shut up now.



PCZONE
42

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$999 (£6)

A LOW SCORE, you might think, but *Republic* was one of those games that just oozed potential, but sadly never lived up to the hopes and dreams of players. Perhaps the ultimate lesson for developers in how to aim far, far too high, *Republic* should still be praised for trying to achieve the spectacular.

A wonderful idea – start a political party in a Soviet-style state and rise slowly to power – it was let down by being slow-paced, incomprehensible and

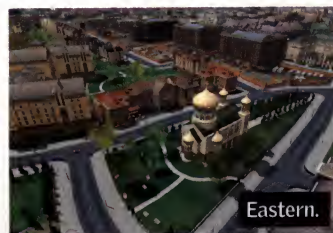
eye-meltingly boring. But it could have been so much more. Designer Demis Hassabis – a student of grand spin master Peter Molyneux – tried to cram so much technology into *Republic* that the end result was a sad mess.

One of gaming's greatest missed opportunities: a political simulator that forgot games need to be fun as well.

PCZONE
68



The Red Army is green.



Eastern.

KINGPIN: A LIFE OF CRIME

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE store.steampowered.com PRICE \$999 (£6)

HAS ANY GAME in history had as much swearing as *Kingpin*? If there is one, I'd like to hear about it because every sentence in this game is filled with expletives. My personal favourite is, "Fuck you, you fucking fuck!" which kind of sums up the dialogue.

Created by Xatrix Entertainment (who became Gray Matter, and are now part of Treyarch), you play

a foul-mouthed thug who is left beaten and bloodied in a gutter by some other foul-mouthed thugs who work for foul-mouthed prince thug Nicci Blanco, who works for... well, you get the idea. Lots of thugs, regular beatings and shootings,

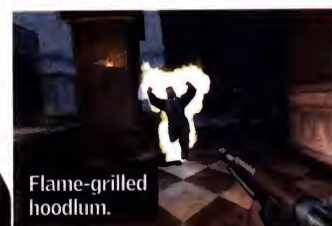
insane levels of swearing and Cypress Hill, both in person (voices) and musically in the background.

Kingpin has retained a little of its charm, although it feels clunky and old. Most famous for its violence and foul language, that's the way it'll always stay, as the gameplay, once beloved, doesn't stand up to modern scrutiny, apart from having the best in-game usage of lead piping since *Cluedo*.

PCZONE
70



"My pipe, your face, sucker!"



Flame-grilled hoodlum.

AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



VR SOCCER 96

PRICE \$599 (£3.65), Good Old Games
Called *Actua Soccer* in this country, there's absolutely no point in playing this now.

31



DEUS EX COMPLETE

PRICE £9.77, Mastertronic
Featuring perhaps the best and the most reviled games ever in one package.

90



PRÆTORIANS

PRICE £4.88, Mastertronic
Made by the guys who did *Commandos*, but nowhere near as good.

51

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PRICE £10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

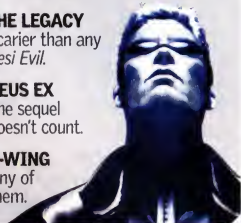
PCZ TOP 5 GENRES THAT ARE... ODD

- 1 PROGRAMMING GAMES**
Finish off coding a game for a lazy coder.
- 2 ARTHOUSE GAMES**
Just plain pretentious.
- 3 ANIMAL SIMULATORS**
Who'd want to be an ant?
- 4 NOVEL GAMES**
Why not just read a novel?
- 5 DATING GAMES**
Try it for real for once.



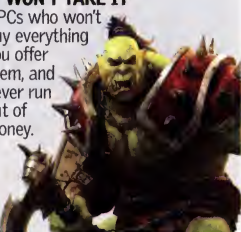
PCZ TOP 5 RETRO GAMES THAT SHOULD BE REMADE

- 1 FREESPACE**
Second best space sim. Ever.
- 2 WING COMMANDER**
Best space sim. Ever.
- 3 THE LEGACY**
Scariest than any *Resi Evil*.
- 4 DEUS EX**
The sequel doesn't count.
- 5 X-WING**
Any of them.



PCZ TOP 5 THINGS THAT'D MAKE A CHANGE...

- 1 RACIAL STEREOTYPES**
How about seeing an ugly elf or a smart orc?
- 2 POLLUTION, INNIT?**
Water that doesn't kill on contact.
- 3 PHRASE BOOK NEEDED**
Aliens who aren't fluent in English.
- 4 INSTANT TAILORING**
Armour and clothes that don't fit you right away.
- 5 "I WON'T TAKE IT"**
NPCs who won't buy everything you offer them, and never run out of money.



FPS



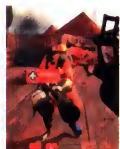
HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD
PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2
PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



CRYSIS WARHEAD
PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%

This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2
PCZ Issue 201 - 90%

A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%

Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%

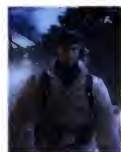
This psion of *System Shock 2* will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue 193 - 91%

This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR
PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%

GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA
PCZ Issue 207 - 87%

The new story in the *Chronicles of Riddick* is a mix of brutal knife fights and stealth, which means you need fast fingers and brains. And it comes with a revamped *Escape from Butcher Bay*.

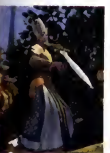
MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips Warhammer into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%
If you fancy a life beneath the waves, this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended. (Well, fish-tailing '60s).

ODDBALL



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 – 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.



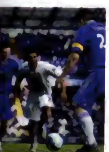
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009
PCZ Issue: 201 – 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.



NBA 2K9
PCZ Issue: 203 – 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 – 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 – 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens – it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

OCTOBER

BORDERLANDS
CITIES XL
FIFA 10
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PES 2010
TROPIC 3

2K GAMES
ATARI
EA
SEGA
CODEMASTERS
KONAMI
KALYPSO MEDIA

NOVEMBER

ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
BLUR
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
LEFT 4 DEAD 2
LEGO INDIANA JONES 2: THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES
MODERN WARFARE 2

THQ
ACTIVISION
EA
VALVE
LUCASARTS
ACTIVISION

DECEMBER

JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR
PLANET 51
VANCOUVER 2010

UBISOFT
SEGA
SEGA

2010

ALIENS VS PREDATOR
ALPHA PROTOCOL
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2
BIOSHOCK 2
DARK VOID
MASS EFFECT 2
MAX PAYNE 3
NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR
STARCRIFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

SEGA
SEGA
EA
2K GAMES
CAPCOM
EA
ROCKSTAR
SEGA
BLIZZARD

**"YOU WON'T FIND A MORE COMPLETE
OR IN DEPTH EXPERIENCE THAN THIS"**

BOOMTOWN.NET

A GRAND STRATEGY GAME

HEARTS OF IRON III



VICTORY AT ALL COSTS

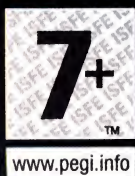


**COMING
SUMMER
2009**



**"HEARTS OF IRON III
IS JUST
ASTONISHING"**

GAMEON.CO.UK



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**PCZONE**

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

ONE TUESDAY...

OR WAS IT a Wednesday? Looking back I'm not sure. Anyway, this day I knew something was wrong the moment I sat down.

I shook the mouse, stifled a yawn and felt my pupils shrink to nothing as the screen dazzled me and the darkness behind me. Ouch, white. No, hang on, very white. Shit.

I reached forward for the keyboard and clipped last night's mug of tea with sleepy-eyed coordination. The cold, sweet smelling liquid went everywhere, slipping past the red glow of the mouse onto my knees, before running backwards out of sight. Behind the desk I heard sugary drips working their way into heaven knows what.

I didn't care, I couldn't care. The ghostly white screen had hypnotised me; impaled me on its emptiness. Where was everything? Anything?

I had to know, I had to do something. But what? What could I do? Did they know I was here? Were they still there?

Having relinquished control to them years ago, my shoulders sank as I realised I could do nothing but watch. Watch and wait in anguish.

Gmail was down. My life was now on hold.

Then someone sensible came in the door, punched me in the side of the head and told me I was a sad bastard with too many solitary interests and that I should go outside and get more fresh air.

And we all lived happily ever after.

Wandy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

SCREEN MAKER TURNS BOOKSELLER

ViewSonic announces two new netbooks

THEIR FLATPANEL DISPLAYS have become buying guide legend, but earlier this year ViewSonic branched out and launched a personal computing line. Now the US manufacturer has announced two netbooks: the entry level VNB100 and high-end VNB101.

The £299 VNB100 features a 1.6GHz Intel Atom processor, 1GB RAM, 160GB hard drive, a decent 10.2in screen, and a high-quality keyboard. Other features include scratch-proof chassis, built-in wireless, webcam, microphone and Bluetooth, plus PCIe card slot, 5-in-1 card reader and three USB ports. The downside is that all this tips the scales at 1.4kg.

Next up is the £329 VNB101. With the same features but a noticeably slimmer design, faster processor and 3400mAh Li-Polymer power pack promising five hours uptime (one less

than the 4600mAh cell in the VNB100) it does seem the lesser of the pair. Poseurs among you might appreciate the sub-10 second boot time, frameless screen, and 300g fat reduction, but with fewer USB ports, smaller battery and a £30 price hike, you'll really have to want the svelte design and fast start-up.

ViewSonic are bundling Windows XP Home – what else? – with each model together with a GPS navigation suite.
viewsonic.com



The £299 VNB100 goes straight to the top of the book pile.

CONFIDENT CLOCKING ASUS do all the work for you

LAST MONTH WE told you about the P7P55D, a new ASUS platform centred around the upcoming LGA1156 socket and Core i5 processor.



This month, ASUS are continuing to make noises about the product's Hybrid Technology. Essentially this is a second CPU that calculates all the necessary

tweaks and clock settings necessary to perfectly optimise your P7P55D-based PC.

The idea is that the bolt-on ASUS processor is able to create a 100% perfect overclock simply by clicking a button and without the need to reboot. There's even a remote control to adjust your Hybrid settings, allowing you to turn the speed of your system up and down from inside games.
uk.asus.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

ALIENWARE'S NEW TACTX brand name appears on an unsightly keyboard and mouse duo apparently designed by a visually impaired madman from the '70s. While it's possible these two products will spearhead a new era of blocky special needs chic, the likelihood is very low.
alienware.co.uk

ANOTHER FORMAT WAR approaches. This time it's between Sony and Panasonic, each of whom are creating slightly different variations of 3DTV technology available as early as next year. Like HDTV, I'm sure 3D will be wonderful once there's something worth watching, but at the moment it's just another acronym.
wikihow.com/watch-less-TV

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS
BY RICHARD COSGROVE

BLUETOOTH: A person who spends their life hunting for naturally blue foods eat alongside bilberries. **HYBRID:** A young bald woman who sits in a bath spouting gibberish, who, when linked to your PC, causes it to travel through hyperspace. **3DTV:** A waste of time, yet probably inevitable. If you have about £5,000 to spend on one and don't need to wear spectacles. **OVERCLOCK:** The latest cool new business speak for running late. "That report will be overclocked by a couple of days boss." **TACTX:** Something the England football team suddenly remembered how to use when they played Croatia.



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

It ain't cheap. But then neither are your video card and processor.



DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.7	22 July 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 190.38	21 July 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

Dear Wandy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

Q POWAAH!!

I'm considering upgrading my computer with a new GeForce GTX 295 graphics card, but I'm not sure if I need to upgrade my power supply as well? I've been told I'll need 1000W, but have also seen forums online saying that 650W has worked!

My system specs include Core 2 Quad Q9300, two optical drives, GeForce 9800 GX2, card reader, and existing 800W power supply.

Kai Jones

A The GX2 and GTX 295 aren't too far removed in terms of power requirements, despite being generations apart. NVIDIA recommend a 580W unit for the former and a 680W for the latter. So I see no reason why your 800W supply shouldn't be up to the job, assuming it meets the criteria laid out in the card specs in terms of connectors and current.

It's worth noting that NVIDIA publish a list of certified power supplies on slizone.com, and you'd be nuts not to choose something that's been as good as recommended by the manufacturer. For example, they list the Antec Signature 850 as ideal for running two 9800 GX2s in SLI, proving the point that it's not necessarily the headline output that's important but how it's delivered.

In your case, I'd go either for the Signature 850 available online for around £180 or for the Corsair 1000W HX for £170 – both units appearing more than once on NVIDIA's approved lists. While these might seem expensive, the price reflects the quality of components and it's comparatively little to pay given your original investment.

Q BEST RES

I was hoping you could help me out with a real dilemma I'm having about buying a replacement LCD screen.



HP's 24in LP2475w is a real peach.

I've been happy with my 21in Viewsonic VP2130b and 1600x1200 resolution, but when I look about it seems more and more displays are becoming widescreen and are around 24in with a native resolution of 1920x1200. So here's the help I need:

First, the games I'm currently playing are *EverQuest II*, *Team Fortress 2*, and *Left 4 Dead*. These only have 1600x1200 as a maximum in the resolution options. Does this list change if I bought a 24in screen? More worryingly, does that mean the games get stretched on screen to fit 1600x1200 on a 1920x1200 screen? This is what I'm worried about the most: that games look distorted.

Second, if I increase my screen size by an extra three inches, doesn't that put more strain on my E8600 and Radeon HD 4870 X2? So my existing games that are running smoothly, will I find I have to decreasing graphics options to run just as smoothly on a slightly large screen?

And last, what screen would you recommend in the 22-24in range? Your guide lists the NEC 27in or the Viewsonic 19in but nothing inbetween. I've £400-£500, but the former is too big for me.

Steven Carr

A To answer your first question, one of the first things a software developer will do inside his game engine of choice is make a note of all the resolutions your hardware is capable of handling. In DirectX the function is called *EnumAdapterModes*. You'd get a similar looking readout from clicking *List All Modes* in the *Adapter* tab of your *Display* control panel.

This list will vary depending on your graphics card, monitor and drivers, and as you've discovered your current setup permits a maximum screen size of 1600x1200 pixels, an area limited only by the VP2130b. Were you to exchange



Just £50 buys you one of the best dual DVB-T tuners.

wandy@dearwandy.com @
dear wandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw ✉

"While these might seem expensive, the price reflects the quality of components"

this screen for another capable of 1920x1200, or even 2560x1600, you'd find the bump stops on resolution sliders both on your Windows desktop and inside games will have moved to accommodate it.

Game engines will then simply re-render the world at the new size you choose, and the image will only be stretched about if you select a resolution smaller than the resolution of your screen. In this instance, things get pulled up to meet the edges of the display using a process called interpolation, the results of which depend on your monitor.

Second, you can work out how much extra work your card will have to do by multiplying the horizontal and vertical pixel counts of both screens, and running these numbers through the calculator at snipurl.com/percentchangelcalc. Just put the smaller value in the Original Number field and the higher one in Second Number, and click OK, to get the percentage change.

As a 1920x1200 display uses 20% more information than a 1600x1200, your card will work 20% harder. It's impossible to say how this will affect your gaming because today's cards –

single-tuner TV card? Nothing flashy, but I need the socket for a booster aerial as my reception is not great.

Also, if I were to buy a 2xx-series NVIDIA card, what sort of native resolution or screen size would be best suited? I've heard that a 19in monitor will not do it justice.

David MacKenzie

A The Hauppauge WinTV-NOVA-T has comically bad bundled software, but as I've found through day-to-day experience over many years, the hardware works flawlessly and is nearly indestructible.

I'm not such a fan of the USB version but I recommend spending a little extra on the dual tuner as it opens up the wonderful world of PVR (recording broadcasts on your computer) to you.

Not sure what you mean by a booster aerial – would you not be better using the aerial you have currently in conjunction with a top quality, one-way domestic TV amplifier such as the Antiference A110 PRO?

Which GeForce were you thinking of buying? If you're leaning towards the

"I recommend spending a little extra on the dual tuner"

the 4870 X2 being a case in point – aren't bothered by such increases. If you leave your detail settings as they are, I'd be surprised if you noticed any reduction in frame rate.

If you're looking to spend between £400 and £500 you could do worse than HP's LP2475w. It's the updated version of my favourite premium display, and at £420 before rebates represents good value for money. Go treat yourself.

Q ANYONE FOR T

Need some advice on a couple of issues. Can you recommend a decent

high-price, high-power versions, then a 19in LCD could be something of a leg iron, particularly if it's an older, 4:3 display with a refresh time measurable by wrist watch.

While you can find 19in products capable of displaying a 1680x1050 resolution – for example, Viewsonic's VX1962wm – you'll waste a lot of your

ALL ABOUT...

20 FLASH MEMORY

Flash memory can be found inside your cameras, mobile phones, games consoles, pen drives, system BIOS, and more recently as a replacement for your hard disk in the form of solid-state drives. Flash is a type of Electrically Erasable Programmable Read Only Memory (EEPROM) and its most important property is that stuff written to it stays put when you remove the power.

Unlike your computer's RAM, data must be specifically erased – 'flash' derives from the electric charge used to wipe early products and isn't a reference to speed.

Although flash memory is known for its ability to read data quickly, one of its disadvantages is that it writes comparatively slowly and particularly when dealing with smaller files. This is the biggest problem affecting the performance of SSDs and, as a result, some drives use DRAM as a buffer. Here, a memory chip is used to pool together several small file changes into one large one and thus sidestep the issue.

An overstated problem is the limited lifespan of flash memory. While they do wear out, you are actually more likely to wear out before your SSD does.



No question about it, Intel make the best SSDs.

time squinting at the small text on web pages and wishing you'd spent the extra on a bigger slab of screen.

Q X2: THE TREAT

I've a Gigabyte GA-K8N51GMF-9 with an AMD 4000+, 2GB RAM across all four slots, Maxtor 60GB HDD, GeForce 8800GT and 500W Jeantech PSU.

Could you give some advice as to where money would be best spent to improve the PC?



Last year's card, today's value performance.

It's used mainly by the children to play games like *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Oblivion* and *PES 2008*. My budget is £250-300.

Gordon Flynn

A The baddest processor your 939-pin AMD board will handle is the Athlon 64x2 4800+, available in dwindling stocks online for around £35. While 4800 looks a decent stride ahead of your existing 4000 branded chip, I'd be surprised if you were able to tell the difference between the two. Still, I'd be inclined to buy the chip anyway – it's the price of a game, and Gigabyte's EasyTune (snipurl.com/easytune) utility will allow you to overclock it.

Next spend £200 on a Radeon HD 4850 X2. This is an older but super card that'll travel well with your next upgrade or sell quickly on eBay should the need arise. **PC7**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Julian6) I'm looking to buy a system for my daughter. It'll need to run *Photoshop 7* and, although she says not, I can see *The Sims 3* looming on the horizon. I've found the Mesh R2S Matrix 9950 with a "256MB NVIDIA GeForce GPU with VGA/DVI/HDMI – Integrated Graphics (SMA)" Would that cope with *Sims 3*? (Wandy) It's going to be just fine for *Photoshop*. I'd install *The Sims 3* and see how it plays. You can always add a new graphics card later if the game runs slowly – even if it seems to be really struggling, no harm will be done. The system as it stands has integrated or 'on-board' graphics power, meaning there's no dedicated gaming hardware for you here.

HOW WE TESTED

NORTHBRIDGE: Communications interface between the CPU, RAM, and video cards, and the southbridge. Integrated into the i5 CPU. **SOUTHBRIDGE:** Interface between the northbridge and the PCI bus; DMA, interrupt and mass storage controllers; clock; power management; BIOS; and many other internal systems. **P55:** Motherboard chipset for the Core i5 processors. **LYNNFIELD:** The codename for Core i5 chips. **BLOOMFIELD:** The codename for Core i7 chips.

P55 MOTHERBOARDS

INTEL'S NEW CORE i5 CPUs look like winners. Their performance is on a par with Core i7s and they promise to be cheaper as a platform. However, there's one snag: they need new motherboards.

Intel have moved the i5's northbridge into the CPUs, while the southbridge chips in i5-compatible P55 mobos are built into the boards.

This leads to two big questions: How does overclocking work? And, are SLI and CrossFire supported?

The mechanics of overclocking are the same as with the i7, but you're tweaking one chip instead of two. This means the key interface is the base clock. Unfortunately, we're not allowed to detail the results of our overclocking tests, but the i5's performance is in the same ballpark as the Core 2 and i7s. Yet results do vary.

Regarding SLI and CrossFire support, there are pros and cons. P55 boards, by default, will support both NVIDIA's SLI and AMD's CrossFire. On the downside, the i5's PCI Express controller is limited to 16 lanes, rather than 40 for the i7. So that's just eight per card in dual-GPU mode, it could reduce the effectiveness of using two graphics cards, and the upgradeability of i5 CPUs and their P55 mobos.

THE MOBOS

The first P55 motherboards are costly fare for enthusiasts.

The ASUS P7P55D Deluxe's single-chip architecture has given it an uncluttered design, with 5-10mm more space between the CPU socket and DIMMs than the other boards. But its biggest attraction is the plug-in TurboV

overclocking remote control. This gives fast access to on-the-fly and preset overclocking settings, without the need to jump into the BIOS. Enthusiasts will also appreciate DIP switches that allow voltage safeguards to be overridden.

Gigabyte's P55-UD6 is as exciting for performance junkies. Stacked with cooling pipes, heat sinks and slick MOSFETs it looks imposing and conventional, sharing the basic layout of a conventional two-chip board.

But the stand-out feature are the six memory slots. But you aren't getting three memory channels, but a dual-channel setup with three slots per channel. This board also has a Marvell SATA controller with 6GBps support, which'll suit SSD arrays. On the downside, Gigabyte has strewn the power, reset and clear-CMOS switches randomly around the board.

Like the ASUS, MSI's P55-GD80 tries to be enthusiast friendly, with buttons for tweaking the base clock and accessing an auto overclocking function. But these are located on the board, not a plug-in-remote. Our first impressions of both features are underwhelming, as

The ASUS P7P55D Deluxe (top), Gigabyte's P55-UD6 (middle), and MSI's P55-GD80, (bottom) mobos.

you get better results with manual BIOS tweaking. But overclockers will welcome the MSI's V-Kit package. This has voltage check points for the CPU and memory controllers, along with hardware DIP switches for overriding voltage safe limits.

At stock clock speeds, the ASUS and Gigabyte boards come out on top thanks to superior management of Core i5's Turbo Boost feature. But in overclocking the ASUS and MSI outpaced Gigabyte by 300MHz.

Still, as interesting as these P55 boards are, we're looking forward to seeing cheaper alternatives. After all, the best thing about i5 is the prospect of i7 performance for Core 2 price. **JL**

SPECIFICATION

	ASUS P7P55D DELUXE	GIGABYTE P55-UD6	MSI P55-GD80
PRICE	£180	£150	£169
WEBSITE	uk.asus.com	www.giga-byte.co.uk	uk.msi.com
SOCKET	LGA1156	LGA1156	LGA1156
RAM	DDR3 (dual channel)	DDR3 (dual channel)	DDR3 (dual channel)
MULTI-GPU	SLI/CrossFire	SLI/CrossFire	SLI/CrossFire
SCORE	85	80	78

"The first P55 motherboards are costly fare for enthusiasts"

HANNS.G HH251HP

PRICE £184 MANUFACTURER Hanns.G
WEBSITE global.hannsg.net

THERE ARE A myriad of 24in screens on the market from reputable and not-so-reputable manufacturers, around the £200 price bracket. This Hanns.G panel we're reviewing here punches below that price point and gives you another screen inch into the bargain.

If you're a designer after a panel with perfect colour saturation and ideal white/black balancing, then this isn't the screen for you. But if you just want a large desktop, then the HH251HP is worthy pick.

Obviously, given its price, this panel has its flaws. The biggest is Hanns.G's

X-Contrast technology, which wrecks the screen's contrast. With the standard contrast set to full, we were able to distinguish the darker greys from the blacks. But with X-Contrast turned on, the screen went so dark the lightest colours were hard to make out. There's also pollution in the white/black gradients too, and the colour saturation isn't great.

That said, the Hanns.G offers a lot of screen for not much money. There are comparable screens out there for this price, but none at this size.



SPECIFICATION

SIZE	24.6in
BRIGHTNESS	300cd/m2
CONTRAST	800:1
RESOLUTION	1920x1080
RESPONSE TIME	5ms
INPUTS	VGA, audio, 2x HDMI
SPEAKERS	2x 1.5W

PCZONE
86
Outstanding value

The HH251HP looks good too; the sleek, glossy black surround is non-intrusive, and it has two HDMI and one DVI. The speakers are wimpy, but you can't beat its price-to-size ratio. **DJ**

EUROCOM D900F PANTHER

PRICE £4,100 MANUFACTURER Eurocom WEBSITE eurocom.com



THE STANDOUT SPEC on this desktop replacement notebook is the CPU: a Core i7 975. Cramming this into a notebook is overkill, but it makes for a good headline.

The high specs don't stop with the processor though: graphics come from an NVIDIA GTX 280M GPU, making gaming on the sharp, bright 1920x1200 screen as smooth as on a high-end desktops. Meanwhile,

three hard drives optimise every loading time possible: a 80GB SSD blasts through booting, while two 500GB HDDs in a striped RAID array provide 1TB of data with fast access.

We've no objection to desktop replacement PCs, but we can't recommend getting the Panther. To start the asking price is huge, even if you opt for more lesser components – such as one hard drive and a Core i7 920 – to save yourself £800.

Even if the price wasn't an issue the new Core i7s and i5s that are due will run as fast as the 975 but create a third of the heat, means that lighter laptops, with better battery life and uncompromising performance, are waiting just around the corner. **AO**

SPECIFICATION

CPU	3.33GHz Core i7 975
GPU	NVIDIA GeForce GTX 280M
RAM	6GB
STORAGE	80GB SSD, 2x 500GB HDD
DISPLAY	17in, 1920 x 1200
DIMENSIONS	397x298x60mm
WEIGHT	5.4kg

BENCHMARKS

FAR CRY 2 (HIGH DETAIL)

1600 x 1024	58fps
1920 x 1200	49fps

WORLD IN CONFLICT (HIGH DETAIL)

1600 x 1024	35fps
1920 x 1200	28fps

PCZONE
62

REMEMBER:
A KEYBOARD
DOESN'T HAVE
AN 'ANY' KEY

Occasionally your PC will throw up a message telling you to "Press any key to continue". When this happens do not waste time by searching for the 'Any' key - you won't find it. Just push down on the nearest key you have to hand (or fingertip). That will do nicely.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear - both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839
intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529
onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321
asus.com

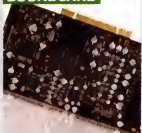


This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUND CARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144
auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live - you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99
seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

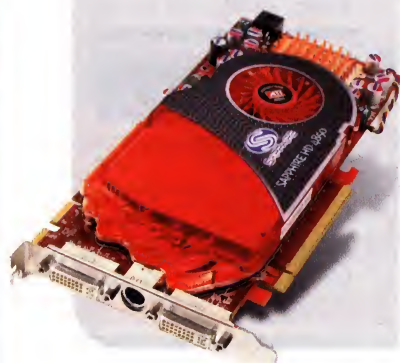
SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44
intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60
asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30
wdc.com



A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUND CARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk

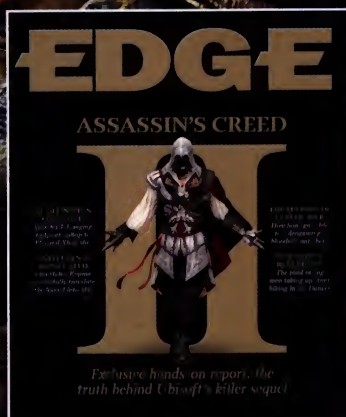


Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

EDGE®

NINTENDO | SONY | MICROSOFT | PC | HANDHELD | COIN-OP | ONLINE

REVEALED:
The revolutionary
realtime graphics
tech behind
WarDevil



**CASTLEVANIA
REINVENTED**
*Can Hideo Kojima
successfully translate
the legend into 3D?*

**ASSASSIN'S
CREED II**
*Exclusive: the truth
behind Ubisoft's
killer sequel*

**BURNOUT'S
BREAKOUTS**
*The road racing
men taking up stunt
biking in Joe Danger*

games radar

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gaming culture**

(and news, previews, reviews, features, videos, screens etc)



PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

GAME-SHY

I TOOK A week off recently, just to recharge the old batteries. Naturally, the first thing I did was think "Now, which games can I play first?" The strange thing was, I didn't fancy playing any games of substance – games that involve devoting a large amount of time to. There's me with a whole week to do absolutely nothing in and all I wanted to do is play *Plants vs Zombies* and watch old episodes of *Law & Order* in a window while doing so. Can you ever get burnt out by games, so much so that you just feel the need to leave them all alone, barring the most simplistic and easy to use?

I think so, just like you can get out of the mood to listen to music, watch TV or do other media-related things. It took me nearly the whole week to load up a serious game, by which time my girlfriend had returned from her own trip and I was forced to do relationship things. Some of those things were nice, but they cut into my gaming time. There's the rub – I'd had nearly seven days to gorge myself with gaming, but I decided to waste it all until restrictions were imposed... and then all I wanted to do was play games again. Gah!

It's strange how games like *Plants vs Zombies* have a greater ability to pull you in for a quick game than better ones do. It's probably down to it being perfect for occupying the space in my mind left over from watching TV.

If anyone is wondering where *The Hat Game* has gone, it's on hiatus due to Steve blowing up two PCs within a matter of days. But it will be back.

David Brown
Staff writer

"Me smash you good!"



FINAL SHOWDOWN

Survival is the key to *Dawn of War II*'s new co-op mode

WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com

THIS MAY HAVE been one of those games that didn't light up our fires in the way we hoped, but that doesn't mean *Dawn of War II* was consigned to the bin of time the second we cast our first glance at it.

Relic, as usual, have been beaver away in an attempt to correct some of the issues we highlighted and others besides, already having produced bumper updates such as the *There is Only War* patch. This added, along with a huge array of balancing tweaks, eight new multiplayer maps, and the Observer and Referee options for watching and overseeing online multiplayer games.

Now the dust has settled on this update, Relic have pushed another big new thing into our faces, namely the Last Stand mode. As the speculation indicated, Last Stand will indeed be a Survival mode, akin to what you might

find in *Left 4 Dead* or those old *StarCraft* maps modelled on *Starship Troopers*.

This will mean you and some buddies will be going up against an unending swarm of enemies, fending off wave after wave until you just can't do any fending anymore.

Managing to outlast each successive wave provides your hero with experience points towards their next level, which, once attained, enables you to unlock new war gear to don in battle. This new equipment brings extra Abilities, new

Traits and improved hero statistics, all of which should make you able to stand up just that little bit longer to the alien menace. At least it is more sophisticated than just "stand in corner, blast enemy, repeat" which is what *L4D*'s Survival mode ended up being.

From what we've played so far, it'll definitely be fun. In fact, we did, definitely, have said fun while playing. However, just like with *L4D*'s Survival mode (and any other, to be honest) it's difficult to see this update having a huge shelf life beyond the initial wow factor. If modders can get to work creating interesting variations, perhaps we'll be proved wrong.

You won't have paid anything to find out if it's any good, so we can only doff our caps to Relic for this. They didn't have to make it, after all, so we're not going to complain. That much.



Harry Potter?

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

851
HOURS*

Demos



Take a tour of the DVD with *Adam Glick*

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Go ever so slightly Batty...

WEBSITE batmanarkhamasylum.com

THIS DEMO'S BEEN a long time coming. There've been plenty of delays and some gnashing of teeth as to why we couldn't get our hands on it earlier. All that's over now, as this demo means you've finally got the chance to play at being Batman.

Venture into the crumbling mental institution of Arkham Asylum, discovering the grotesques and evildoers hiding within its walls. Of course something goes wrong, so you'll need to act swiftly to put things right. You can do this by mopping up the random, faceless scum that assault you on behalf of old Joker himself. Kick, punch, gas, electrocute, strangle, smother, but never kill. That's un-Batty, apparently.

In between drubbing criminals, you might also get to do some investigation, finding clues and maybe solving some Riddler riddles. Enjoy!




Batman never kills. But smothering is allowed.

PROBLEM ZONE


Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.




JOKING AROUND
The Joker has been captured, but your spidey sense is tingling. (Sorry, wrong comic.) Things aren't right, he gave up too easily. Could something happen?

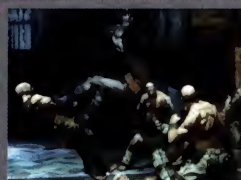


I'M WITH STUPID
Of course it could. Joker had a master plan all along! How could you have anticipated this? Perhaps because it always, always happens? You idiot, Batman!

NO SIGN OF ROBIN HERE...



FEMME FATALE
It's not just the Joker, of course. Other big bad guys are around for your delectation. Harley Quinn plays a prominent and deranged role in the proceedings.



CRASH BANG WALLOP
Maybe Batman just wanted an excuse to kick some hoodlum arse? He'll certainly get his chance, with vast swarms of ruffians charging him.

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

Oh Brother Ray, where art thou?

WEBSITE callofjuarez.com

IN THIS DEMO for the blood-splatted, dynamite-throwing, sharp-shooting Western-'em-up, you'll get thrown right into the middle of the game, where brothers Ray and Thomas are given the task of



Explosives can explode, apparently.

busting some varmint arms dealer out of a Tombstone-esque jail.

This bad guy is vital to the story, you see, so you've got to kick doors in, ride some horses down a steep mountain trail and gape in awe at the stunning scenery. Then you shoot up a load of desperadoes who are rustlin' up your main street in a disrespectful manner.

Also, as this is an urban level, you'll see plenty of comedy roof-tumbling by dead folk: it ain't the bullet the gets 'em - it's the fall.

BROTHERS GRIM



RAY

Star of two *Juarez* games, Ray is one of the best characters we've seen for years.



THOMAS

Something of a sniper, Thomas was also in the first game - as a dead body.

MINI NINJAS

Tiny bodies, big brains

WEBSITE www.minininjas.com

HIRO, FUTO, SUZUME and co might have very small(ish) bodies but that doesn't mean the evildoers they punish don't suffer big pain.

Using both regular attacks and mystical abilities, the tiny heroes need to restore harmony to a world on the brink of chaos. At least one of the

characters can inhabit the bodies of various animals, like bears, to cause some havoc amongst the evil samurai.

Mini Ninjas is made by the guys who did *Hitman*, but there's no silenced pistol skull devastation here. This is strictly family friendly fare, not a brutal look at the world of assassination. Pity.



1. SHUN

This mini ninja likes to use a bow and is also a master of stealth.

2. EVIL GUYS

Hordes of these guys will be whackable. Once dead, they revert to their non-corrupted animal selves.

3. BIG 'UN

This guy will clearly take a bit more punishment before he can be saved.

TWIN TOWERS



HIRO

The main mini ninja, and the most mini of all. He can possess animals, stop time, manipulate nature, and all sorts.



SUZUME

This lass uses stealth to defeat enemies. And her flute shoots darts as well. Nifty.

BEST OF THE REST



Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



DEMIGOD

demigodthegame.com

The RPG/RTS hybrid with the giant controllable walking castles is here for you try. You'll like it if you liked *Defense of the Ancients* for *Warcraft III*.



DARKEST OF DAYS

darkestofday.com

Take on the role of historical protector as in this FPS in which you visit times of trouble in history to alter events.



WORLD OF BATTLES

www.worldofbattles.com

One of those MMORTS games you've been hearing so little about, but that doesn't mean it isn't worth a shot. It's free too, so you've got nothing to loose.



ARMA II MODDING TOOLS

snipurl.com/arma2editor

Create as much warfare as you can imagine with these powerful editors. Just make sure you include at least one animal to lark about with though.

**HOT
DOWNLOADS**
PCZONE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010 DEMO

snipurl.com/champmandemo

See if what we've been saying is true. Is it really the challenge to the great *Football Manager* that we've been hoping for, or is it more Djimi Traore than Jamie Carragher?



HEARTS OF IRON III DEMO

snipurl.com/hoi3demo

This hardcore strategy game does its best to get the juices pumping, but there's only so much you can do with hexes and a baffling amount of raw statistics. Unless you're the type of person who drools seeing a hot maths textbook.



Freeware

Adam Glick scrabbles around in the freebie bin



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

This month we go all *Top Gear* and drive a French 16-wheeler around in circles; play four games at once; try to get laid with as many women as we can; go all Bruce Lee; and collect a herd of bulls and send them on a rampage (sadly, not in a china shop this time).

GLICK'S PICK



MULTITASK

DEVELOPER IcyLime

WEBSITE snipurl.com/icymultitask

COULD THIS GAME provide concrete evidence to support the theory that women are better than men at multitasking? The only way to find out is to force some women to play it with you. We know some, and it turns out they're no better than the men. As we all know, it's only in the world of gaming that this matters. Who cares if women can multitask better in other areas if they can't balance a ball on a thick black line, avoid arrows, touch boxes and press space a bit all at the same time?

Multitask then is just aimed at proving how many games you can play at one time without losing your mind and getting all confused.

You start off with the ball and line balancing game, before the screen splits in half and gives you a block to move up and down in order to avoid being hit by incoming arrows, while balancing the ball.

After you play those two games for a bit, you also have to use WSAD to move another block around to touch some targets, while fourth up is a spaceship you move up and down by holding or releasing the space bar. After that, who knows? We didn't get past the spaceship challenge.

I get the feeling Renault has something to do with this race.



RENAULT TRUCK RACING

Trucks are manly. Lilac trucks aren't

DEVELOPER Game Seed WEBSITE www.renault-trucks.info/truckracing

DECIDING WHETHER TO call this a proper game or not is difficult. While it certainly feels like a full game when you play, unless I'm more mistaken than a man who thinks Hilaire Belloc is still alive, it only has one track. I don't think I'm that mistaken, so I'm going with the "it's only got one track" argument for now. Even if it does indeed have more than one, it clearly isn't immediately obvious or easy to get to.

That this racer has only one track is a bit of a shame, because it's pretty good fun. For a truck racing game at least. There's only so much joy to be had trundling about in a large truck, after all. Especially if said fun has to be confined to the same track over and over again.

The game itself is strictly by-the-book – there are no flamethrowers or comic oil slicks you can lay on the track to foil your opponents. As you'd expect from a branded racing game, it's about making Renault's trucks look great. You can damage them, but only in a "trust us, it's damaged" way – so don't expect bits of the truck to be flying about all over the place.

The other letdown is the soundtrack: it's got to be one of the most hideous in the history of computer gaming. Even a PC speaker symphony from the '80s would've been better than this. It's so rubbish, I'm not sure why it was left in the game.

For a free game, *Renault Truck Racing* looks good. Obviously, with the funding provided by the French car

Doesn't a real truck have a bigger dashboard?



manufacturer, you'd think it'd look better than something like *Bullfist*, but it's still nice to see pleasing visuals in a free title. It's not wonderful, only offering up to Shader Model 2.0 support, and there's a strange bright yellow sand effect when the AI hits the dirt beside the track, but everything is clean, functional and safe.

As it won't cost you a penny, you might as well download it and give it a go. The single track means it won't last long, but if you simply must experience what it's like to drive a Renault truck then this is the most best way to do it. Unless you're planning on being a truck driver in real life, of course. Or perhaps you are one. If those two things don't apply to you, then consider my last statement accurate.

BACKDOOR MAN

Taking it like a man

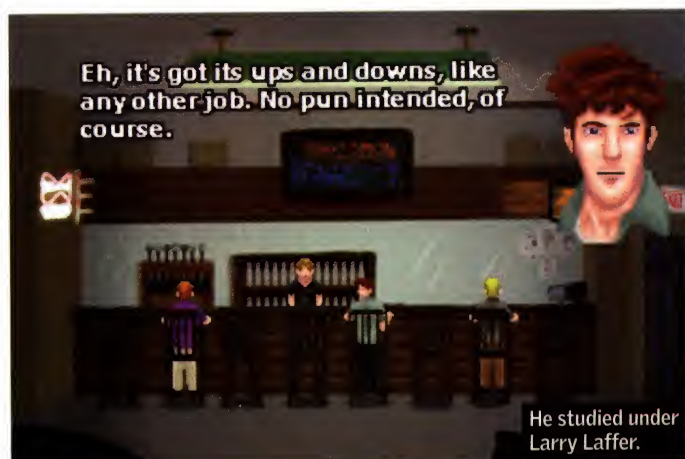
DEVELOPER Edmundo Ruiz, Fernando Gonzalez
WEBSITE snipurl.com/backdoorman (direct download)

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a game to play at work, perhaps this one isn't the sort of thing you should be looking at, especially if you think a pixelated todger would get you into trouble. That's what you see if you make the right conversational choices in *Backdoor Man*, the story of a young chap who gets paid to put his own young chap into ladies' lower areas.

Created using the increasingly versatile *Adventure Game Studio*, it's basically a long conversation with a tiny bit of point-and-click work. It's also a bit pervy, though as it was created for TIGSource's Adult/Education competition, we'll let them off that particular charge.

There are three separate stories your character tells the barman, with numerous outcomes possible for each one, all of which change what happens at the very end.

It's a very short game, but because of the way these things are created, you'd probably want to go back and see what happens if you chose different options (or to persist with the young woman's story if you're kinky). So, while it's a completely throwaway thing, you'll certainly get your 20 minutes worth of play if you try to get all the endings. And at least you didn't have to watch your character have sex with the bed-ridden old woman. That would have been going too far.



He studied under Larry Laffer.



KUNG FU 2

A bit of slap and tickle

DEVELOPER Gary Gasko **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/kungfu2 (direct download)

DESIGNED TO BE part of last year's Retro Remakes competition, Gary Gasko's *Kung Fu 2* provides all the martial arts 2D beat-'em-up action you could possibly require.

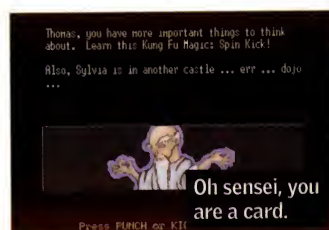
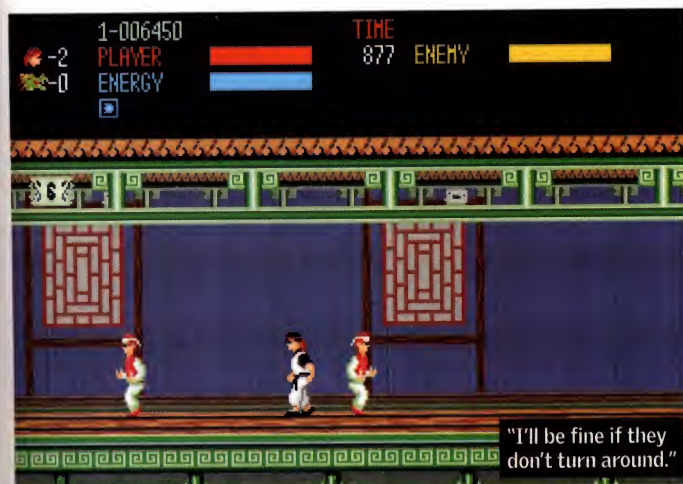
This game has been around for a while, but when every other freeware title coming out these days is highly pretentious crappery with maybe the ability to click a bit constituting the game section, I'll withdraw into older, more classic pursuits, such as kicks, punches and special moves suspiciously

similar in style, sound and execution to a certain game with the words *Fighter* and *Street* in the title. Nevermind though, at least it makes them easy to pull off. It's also difficult and manages to poke fun at *Mario* as well, which we always welcome.

Luckily, *Kung Fu 2* doesn't penalise you that much for being inept, as there are unlimited continues. All that happens is you lose your current score and go back to 0. You'd have to be some kind of gaming god to get through the

whole thing without losing all of your lives anyway, so it's good the decision was made to include this feature. Enemies that block your path are reasonably varied, including annoying jumping monkeys, little midgets that either bite your ankles or go for the face, plus some strange boss characters that belch fire, throw bones and charge you with horns and a shield.

Even with the unlimited continues, you probably won't bother playing to the end. Award-winning it might be, but the novelty does wear off and some of the enemies are very frustrating (especially those monkeys). It does do an almost perfect job of recreating the kind of game you'd have got in 1984, so just be glad you're living in age where games are easier. But if you're a glutton for punishment, you'll definitely love this game. For a bit.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



BULLFIST

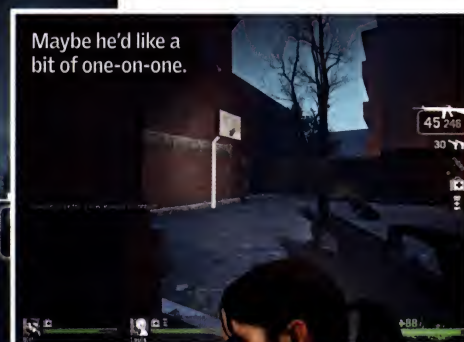
DEVELOPER Terry Cavanagh, Hayden Scott-Baron and Alex May
WEBSITE snipurl.com/bullfist

THIS GAME HAS you destroying capitalism using a stampede of raging bulls. You have to move your collection of angry bovines along a scrolling screen, avoiding convenience stores and cars until you've managed to obtain a herd large enough to destroy them. To do that, you move your initial two bulls over a parked one, who'll get caught up in the socialist stampede.

The more bulls you have, the more things you can destroy. Two can take out a man in a suit, and four a car. Collect six and the stores can be taken out by the unlocked Rampage mode. But if you're down to only one bull, it can't destroy anything, as it needs the power of the commune to thrive.

Extend

David Brown checks on the latest mods, maps and add-ons



HEAVEN CAN WAIT

Another reason you might give *L4D2* a miss...

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead [WEBSITE snipurl.com/heavencanwait](http://snipurl.com/heavencanwait)

WE MENTIONED THIS one in issue 212's *Left 4 Dead* mods round-up, but we think it deserves a proper look on here.

Set over five levels, *Heaven Can Wait* starts in a sedate manner. Really, it's only remarkable for its refusal to give you any weapons barring a single pistol for at least half of its length. On this lonely country road with abandoned cars scattered about the place, you battle through a couple of hordes, probably while perched on top of said vehicles for protection. Once at the end of the road, the first special bit happens: a bridge collapses in an impressively

unexpected manner, leaving you to deal with a large swarm of Infected from a nearby farm. Luckily, automatics have been left for you, along with health kits.

Make it through the farm and into the second level and this is where you'll begin to feel the burn. A quiet motel backs onto a dark, spooky forest, complete with secret cave passages and a superbly recreated cemetery that is easily the equal of anything on show in Valve's maps. Startling some crows leads to a huge swarm that will take out even the most determined of teams if they're not properly organised and have struggled through the rest of the level. The Zone

experts managed to make it through – just – on Advanced, so if you're man (or woman) enough to try it on Expert, we'll definitely be doffing our caps.

After this is a more commonplace urban environment, with a unique exception. You may have read about the way *Left 4 Dead 2* is using gauntlet-style finales, where you'll have to keep moving as an endless stream of Infected come at you, making for a genuinely exciting experience. Well, you can get a taster of what that's going to be like in *HCW*, which has such a sequence in a car park sequence. If you happen to be dumb enough to set off the alarms (which is inevitable) you're going to have to battle through an endless swarm of Infected. It's all very, very tricky and very, very exciting.

After this, the rest of the campaign seems like an anti-climax, but that doesn't mean it isn't still top-notch. There's even a train that takes you from the end of the fourth level to the military base finale, which sees you attempting to get onto a slowly ascending lift, while tanks rush you. It also takes longer than usual, so don't be expecting an easy escape.

All in all, this is clearly one of the best campaigns we've seen for *L4D*, up there with *Death Aboard*. It could have done with a little bit more in the way of unique scenery, and the gauntlet-style car park bit in the middle made the final sequences less dramatic. Still, it's one every *L4D* obsessive should have installed, even if only to brag about how they completed it on Expert.

"This is one of the best campaigns we've seen for *Left 4 Dead*"

PLANETFALL

Civilization... IN SPACE!

MOD FOR Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/planetfall

SID MEIER'S SCI-FI sequel to *Civilization Alpha Centauri* may not have lit up the imagination, but that doesn't mean it's worthless as a concept. Certainly, the people who've laboured over *Planetfall* don't think so, given they've attempted to create the "atmosphere and story of *SMAC*" for a generation of new players in *Civilization IV*.

They've done well, too, judging by the evidence of the current version of their mod. This mod basically transfers *Alpha Centauri* into *Civ4*'s engine, with all

that brings with it. Whether it's more fun than the original is up to you to decide, but what it definitely has is that indefinable something that all games (and most mods) based on the work of Sid have. That is, the ability to completely reel in the player and get them playing for hours and hours at a time.

While we're never going to give up our regular *Civ* diet or even say this is better than the Earth-based mods we've covered in recent issues, it's still worth it if you fancy a modern take on the *Alpha Centauri*



experience. You never know, you might actually find it interesting. And make sure you have the You're best off heading over to snipurl.com/planetfallpatch for updates. Just in case you understand.

SILENT MASQU

For the RPG that'll never die

MOD FOR Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/silentmasqu

THIS IS A large high-res skin pack for *Vampire: Bloodlines*. What you'll get if you install it is a load of new character and weapon models, plus a selection of major NPCs done up to the Nines (in-joke).

There's also a slew of new interface tweaks – like a new crosshairs for first-person view and the flamethrower – plus enhanced object textures, vehicle skins and main menu changes. There's

even some new sounds made by a some modder called Cloud9.

Finally, perhaps the only reason we noticed this mod was the picture it uses on ModDB – two buxom and nude female vampires expressing their mutual admiration for each other. Please don't write in complaining that we're lewd. We are aware of it and don't intend to change.



THE HAUNTED

Even UT3 can't escape the clutches of L4D

MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 3 **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/thehaunted

FANCY LIBERATING SOME cursed places from the minions of evil? "Who doesn't?" would be the answer to that question if you asked one of the developers of this mod: a third-person action extravaganza that has made it big by shining in the Make Something Unreal contest.

Described as an "intense multiplayer experience", you can play it in Co-op or

Demons vs Humans, although there's a third mode.

The first mode is self-explanatory – team up with other humans to take on the AI beasts.

In the second one, players who take control of the monsters act in a similar way to the AI Director in *Left 4 Dead*, either spawning enemies and taking control of them personally, or placing

traps and triggering environmental hazards to keep the human players on their toes.

Co-op mode is similar to *L4D*, with four humans forming a team, while Demons vs Humans is just like *L4D*'s Versus, being that it is a four vs four battle. The third mode is Demonizer and involves a co-op style mode where each dead human player turns into a demon until none are left alive.

The Haunted looks absolutely gorgeous and there's no reason why it shouldn't take off. There's also gibs and gore flying about all over the place, which is always a welcome sight. What's more, the fact it has a set of distinct modes should give it significant replay value.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



VECTOR MOD

MOD FOR Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/vector

This mod is described as an infection engine, allowing "seamless disease transfer between the player, NPCs and creatures". Just what you've all been waiting for, a mod that makes monsters faint because they've got a bit of a sniffle.

It's difficult to imagine a mod more pointless. *Horse Armor*, maybe.

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DRESS TO KILL

Pants and boots aren't the only new things in *Battlefield Heroes*
Thor's Turbojet outfit – eight **EXCLUSIVE** and **PERMANENT** items

TROUSERS

We hope that bulge isn't a form of alien growth.

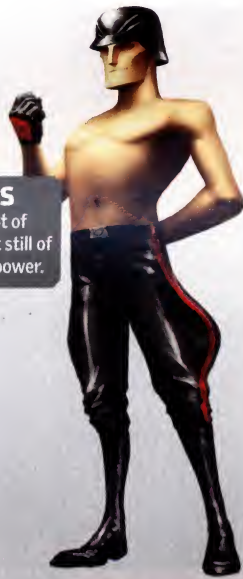


BOOTS

This footwear aids in stomping Royals to death.

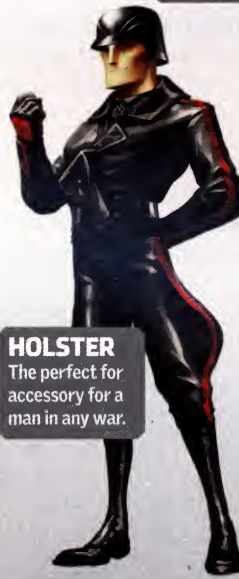
GLOVES

Gloves, not of metal, but still of supreme power.



HELMET

Deflect pesky bullets with this metal skullcap.



JACKET

The black leather gives you a real faux-SS air.

HOLSTER

The perfect for accessory for a man in any war.

ROCKET

Perfect for the pseudo-Nazi who's on the go.

MASK

For a genuine Man in the Iron Mask look.



1

PCZ 210

2

PCZ 211

3

PCZ 212

4

THIS MONTH

AND SO, THE end is near. You should be almost completely decked out in a funky leather outfit, blasting away at your Royalist enemies as they gawp at your finery.

But, of course, your grotesque visage is still visible and your back must surely

feel strangely unadorned with phallic objects. Aha! We have just the thing – a grisly Dumas-style iron face mask to hide your abhorrent features and a rocket pack to allow you to flee your enemies in style (even though it is just cosmetic and won't actually do anything of the sort).

That's about it for our grandiose promotion. We'll be having the review of the full product in issue 214, and we'll be certain to sport our glad rags around



THE CODE IS ON THE DVD SLEEVE

Don't throw your DVD away! You'll be tossing your code in the bin of you do. So, pick it up out of the trash, dust it down and notice the code printed all nicely for you.

battlefield-heroes.com

the numerous servers that exist. It'll be like running up to people and screaming "PC ZONE!" into their ears at full

volume, just visually and silently. It's been a long journey, but we're finally here. Are you ready to fight for the Zone, soldier? Get out there and kill (in the game, only in the game – PC ZONE's lawyer) those dastardly PC Gamer scum in their Royals uniforms.

Onwards to glorious victory, dear friends! Dear band of Zone brothers!

BUT WHAT IF I MISS AN ISSUE?

Just go online visit my favourite magazines.co.uk/gamesradarshop. Click on the **PC ZONE** on the shelf, and you'll be able to get the issues you've missed. Unless they've sold out.

"The good things to be found here could be said to be plentiful"

David Brown, *PC ZONE* 208

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

Oh dear, should we really have chosen *Counter-Strike: Source* for our monthly reader love-in? Tempers can fray, anger is commonplace and mouse-slamming swear sessions are routine. See how we fared down below to the right a bit. Our Twittering continues apace, which you can read about just below here and over the page there are some words not typed by us and some conversational pleasantries. Enjoy!

tw@tter

Tennis inspired tweets



Robert Smith. Not the Robert Smith?

WE GAVE YOU the chance to influence us in a way you perhaps never thought possible – by priming us with question bombs ready to spit at Joe 'Kane from C&C' Kucan at GamesCom. You can read his answers on page 22, if you haven't already. Perhaps your question made it in, perhaps it didn't. It helped anyway, we promise.

Outside of the wacky world of professional question asking we considered what would happen under ObamaCare, positing the idea that everyone would electrocute themselves in bizarre floating accidents. There was also a mention of the bizarrely named Professor Robert Smith? Yes, he really does have unnecessary punctuation in his name. And no, he doesn't have anything to do with The Cure, before anyone says anything.

And let's not forget that monumental screw-up by the UK government: forgetting to send a letter to the EU means those BBFC certificates on movies and games don't mean anything. Oh, to be a 13-year-old boy right now.

Remember, we like being followed, so do get down to Twitter Town and prod us textually until we respond. Goodness will inevitably follow.

FIGHT CLUB

Scouting for kills

WHEN FIGHT CLUBS turn to *Counter-Strike: Source*, big gulps of apprehension are taken here at Zone Towers. Our ineptitude is so great that most of the time we're just sat there looking at everyone else play, having been killed almost instantly by a random headshot from an AK-47.

Even the addition of resident work experience guy Nick Brakespear was unlikely to change our fortunes, given he describes his own CSS abilities as "vile". Nevertheless, he put on a good show for once, achieving an average kill/death ratio of 1:1, which most people would be happy with. We wanted him to do better, so we locked him in the dungeon for the night to teach him a lesson.

Skirmishing began on *de_piranesi*, derided as a terrible map by Fight Club regular, Ghostchanter. Given he complained about anything and everything for the entire event, most people just tuned him out.

Treated as an aperitif before the main course, it was useful for getting trigger fingers warmed up and brains fully engaged on the task at hand before *cs_italy* sprang into view. Things didn't go well for the Terrorist defenders, the first few rounds involving a severe butt-slapping being handed out by the counter-terrorists. At one point, they managed to rescue three of the four hostages, with only idiocy preventing them from completing a clean sweep.

The pyramid ended abruptly.



"We locked Nick in the dungeon for the night to teach him a lesson"

Things change quickly in CSS though. A heroic (or should that be villainous?) effort from one terrorist, *dee4life*, saw him eliminate nearly half the CT team with only seven hit points remaining. This valiant stand spurred the terrorists into life, with David's Scout suddenly finding its targets for the first time. Scoping out of the main window of the hostage location, countless CTs were felled by his mighty weapon. Eschewing the AWP as

a weapon for sissies, the Scout is the choice of a real man. It didn't stop the CTs winning virtually every round, but at least it was a bit more even.

The next map was *de_chateau*, which saw the terrorists finally overcome the resistance of the CTs and record a 9-2 victory. The secret seemed to be teamwork, as the CTs spread their defences too thin, leaving gaps for the combined terrorist forces to exploit. Punching through to both bomb sites on a regular basis, the CTs were struggling to hold back their opponents, despite Nick's best efforts. Even the appearance of The Tingle couldn't spark a revival, his cowardly hiding in the corner tactics failing to turn the tide of battle.

Despite Ghostchanter's constant complaining, a good time was had, again, by all. If you missed out this month, be sure to get involved in next month's shoot-out.

When shotguns go wrong.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Are Activision right or wrong to jack up the *Modern Warfare 2* price?

BEATS12: Activision are being a bunch of c**ts. Our only hope is that enough people refuse to buy it on release to show them that the price is too high. But the mindless masses will lap it up.

DAFTVADER: While I don't mind spending a few pennies on a game, and would pay a few quid more for premium titles, they're taking the piss a little. They'll complain like mad when their most expensive PC title is pirated because it's so bloody expensive.

DISC10: Well I was thinking of buying it new, but now I'm just gonna buy it secondhand, so those greedy turds don't get my money.

DR_DARK: I'm not paying more than £29.99 for any game. Certainly not a standard edition. Anyone got the time to paste the head of Activision's boss over Brad Pitt's on the *Inglourious Basterds* poster and rename it *Greedy Basterds*?

JOWOO: I hope other publishers realise that by keeping their prices

down this Christmas they'll probably nick some sales off Activision.

THESTALKING HEAD: I can't believe you guys are getting so worked up over a couple of quid. I'm pretty sure by week two of it being in the shops it'll be less than £30 anyway.

BEATS12: It's the principle of the thing! In all seriousness, I'll be boycotting this title. Every self-respecting gamer should too, unless you want this higher price to become the norm.

JOWOO: Boycott? I personally see a great big Jolly Roger off the port side.

SUNSCRAMBLE: While Activision are a veritable bastion of evil, and this move on their part sucks to the point where the last vestiges of my already withered desire to buy this particular game have finally been boiled away to less than nothing. At least I appreciate that they've been upfront and honest about the whole procedure.

There'll be drive-by snowings a-plenty.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been sealed in a tomb by a nefarious Nazi villain with a crooked smile – then feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
Nick Brakespear [PCZ]flatline
Chris Capel [PCZ]thetinger

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

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SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT

Massaging the buttocks of a bat

No chairs here.



EMBRACING THE WORLD of Batman while Zone Chat was going on, the *PC ZONE* team wasn't involved in this month's chat as much as we would have liked to have been. Nevertheless, the chatting stalwarts held the fort in our partial absence.

Flatline claimed he was raping David's chair with wanton abandon, but a quick check revealed it was actually the chair belonging to absentee Steve who took the brunt of his sexual punishment. This led the assembled mass to discuss whether it was possible for a woman to be convicted of rape. It is possible, people. We saw a *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* episode dealing with that very topic.

Zone Chat regular peachFUZZ wondered aloud how one would sodomise a cake, continuing the event's disturbingly rectal theme.

Papa Smurf grew sick of the topic and told everyone to stop talking about bumming cakes and sprinkling cherries; a move that was met with bemusement by other chatters.

Bigboy0007 drew an ASCII picture of a penis in an attempt to raise the tone, but it was brought right back down by Dave Lemon, who insisted on talking about *Burnout Paradise*. "Was it worth the money?" he asked, to which Papa Smurf responded, "Yeah, I'd say so."

It was at this point that everyone else left them to it and jumped onto the Fight Club server.

HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE Chat*, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about




Windows Vista is the new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the new interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game footage

of Crysis at www.crysis-online.com. You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from a single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free. 

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance your PC will run Windows Vista without upgrades, especially if it's capable of playing the latest 3D games. But all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your PC meets the requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready. Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful

your processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating of how well your PC will run Windows Vista

Game information

Click on any game icon and you'll see information about who made the game, when you last played it and what version you have.



See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder and access your previous saves.

Super Media Center

Windows Media Center is at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect up your PC to an HDTV and browse your music and video collection. What's more, you can bin your set-top DVD recorder! With Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play, record and timeshift TV programmes. Get hold of Windows Media Center Extender (a device that plugs into your TV) and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, this Extender capability is already built into it.

All your games

All your games are now stored in one handy location. Install a Windows Vista game, and its icon will appear here.

Game rating

All games designed to be played on Windows Vista are rated, so you can see if your system will be up to playing them. You can also stop the kids from playing ultra-gory games that have adult age ratings.

New built-in games

Old classics, such as Minesweeper and Solitaire, have been improved and updated with Windows Vista, plus there are a few additions, such as Purple Place and Mahjong Titans.

Get more from your PC with Windows: The Official Magazine

If you want to get the very best from your Windows PC then pick up a copy of *Windows Magazine*, which tells you everything you need to know

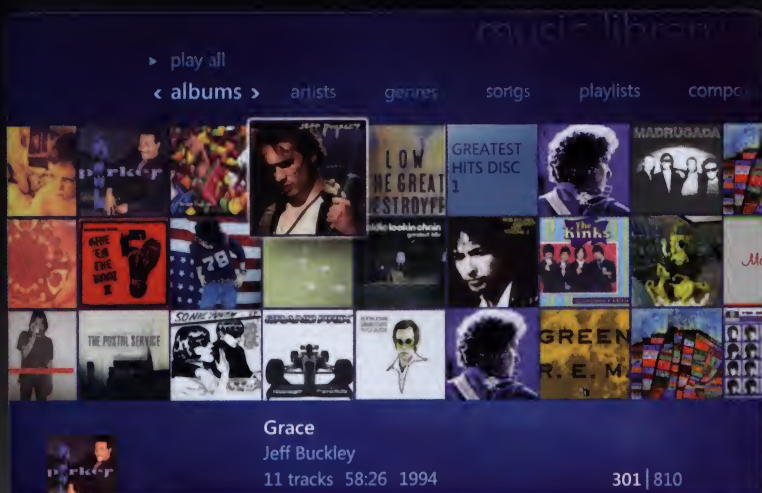
We show you...

- How to improve your life with your PC
- How to get the perfect Windows 7 installation
- How to create your own PC game
- The best new kit to buy
- Great new games and software



Issue 36 is out now

Find out more at www.officialwindowsmagazine.com



EASY LISTING Intuitive menus help you to browse through your music collection

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

WING COMMANDER

I'VE BEEN TOLD that whenever I do Retro Zone, I just talk about old adventure games. Well they are the best games ever, but I'm always willing to compromise, so here's the best space combat game ever made: *Wing Commander*.

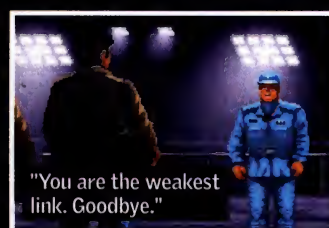
I can't be doing with your X-Wings and TIE Fighters, just give me a lantern-jawed, blue-haired hero fighting some big cats in space, and I'm as happy as

a porcine covered in excrement. It just combines all the best elements of gung-ho space operas with an exciting (even now) combat model.

Did you know the commander of the legendary TCS Tiger's Claw was called Colonel Halcyon? I only just realised that when playing it again for this piece. What a guy he was! Doling out the medals like anything just for killing five Kilrathi on a routine patrol mission. Just

a pity he got wiped out when the old Claw got blown to bits by cloaked fighters. Worst thing was you got the blame, leading to your re-emergence as the best fighter in the galaxy after a number of years at a piss-ant space station in the Gwynedd system in *Wing Commander 2: Vengeance of the Kilrathi*.

The first two games of the series are the most fondly remembered. Both followed the same format – starting off in a bar or locker room, you could catch on gossip from other fighters in *WC1*, or advance the story through a cutscene in *WC2*. Once you'd done that, perhaps having a glance at the kill board as well, you'd enter the mission bit and get your briefing on.



"You are the weakest link. Goodbye."

After being assigned your objectives, you'd then see the most iconic moment: the rush to your spacecraft with sirens blaring. Fired out into space, you then proceeded along your course blasting Dralthi, Salthi and anything else ending in -thi along the way. There were also annoying asteroid belts and mine fields to traverse, plus bastard hard defend the transport/capital ship missions. There was even a branching plotline, with your performance determining how the war against the Kilrathi went. Great games that, sadly, we'll probably never see the likes of again... or will we?



But how? Get that cat!

Wing Commander is not, in any way, an abandonware game. In fact, its trademark has just been renewed by the people who bought and then fucked up Origin: EA.

However, we're not going to say that these games aren't available any more. You could probably buy the collection released in 1997 – we saw a copy on Amazon for \$0.99 and there's always eBay.

There's also another way. See if you can guess what it is.

amazon.co.uk – There should be some used copies there

ebay.co.uk – There might well be a friendly merchant ready to help you out/rip you off.

Origin of the Series The various faces of Wing Commander



1 HALCYON
The man who dolos out the medals in the first *Wing Commander* has a fantastic name.



2 YOU
His hair's not as blue in the second game, but you still get to save humanity as him.



3 MARK HAMILL
No blue hair this time, just Luke Skywalker and some incredibly expensive FMV sequences.



4 CHIEF PRETTY OFFICER
Porn star Ginger Lynn Allen didn't need to sleep with the producer to get this role.



5 BIG CAT
See, the Kilrathi weren't all bad. The defector Hobbes was an intelligent and loyal companion. Who dies. Pity.



6 BARKING MAD
Malcolm McDowell played the mental Admiral Tolwyn and lit up the screen with a stellar performance.

Now & Then

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING vs SEAL TEAM



Realism.

THOSE PEOPLE WHO want realism in their FPS games are spoilt: there's *ArmA II* and *Dragon Rising* (for those who can spend money) and *America's Army III* (for those who are misers). But these weren't the first games to be made by developers whose attention to military detail borders on the fetishistic.

1993 saw the release of *SEAL Team*. This was one of the first proper military simulations, partly because it used a flight simulator's game engine, but mainly because it tried to accurately portray the fieldcraft SEALs used to stay the alive, while they snuck around swamps killing people during the Vietnam War.

But since *SEAL Team* came out, one question has never been answered: there've been black SEALs since the unit was founded in '61. So why are all the SEALs in this game white?



Polygonism.

Play it! Want to shoot some gooks? Then here's how...

- 1 Look in the *Yellow Pages* for your local army surplus store. Buy swamp boots, US camouflage-patterned trousers, a black T-shirt, a scrim scarf, a bowie knife, and camocream. Scowl.
- 2 Buy a one-way ticket to Hanoi. Put on your new gear, cover your face with stripes of the military make-up, wear the scrim scarf as a bandana. Leave for the plane. Scowl.
- 3 Go to the airport and collect your ticket. When security guards ask why you're trying to take a huge knife onto a plane while dressed as an extra from *Platoon*. Scowl.
- 4 Or just get a copy of the game from ebay.co.uk. This has the advantage of ensuring you aren't indefinitely detained under the Mental Health or Terrorism acts.

MAMEframe

ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

REMEMBER THE SIMPLE joy of *Elevator Action*? Shooting guards popping out of doors while leaping on and off a door-less elevator? Well, 11 years later came its sequel: *Elevator Action Returns*.

While *Returns* kept the original's basic gameplay – you run around the building, jumping in and out of a door-less elevator, while shooting bad guys – *Elevator Action Returns* added factors that we take for granted today: a proper plot, cut-scenes, co-operative play, cute anime girls, rocket launchers, and plenty of gratuitous violence.

In the original you bloodlessly shot cloned guards or dropped lamps on their heads. In *Returns* you riddled their bodies with a machine gun, or used

rockets to ignite the bad guys, leaving you to calmly watch your foes flail and scream as flames melted their skin. Yet the bad guy's attack dogs seemed immune to the immolation rocket – setting canines on fire must've been judged to be bad taste back then.

Yes, arcade games came a long way in those 11 short years.

What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal.

So don't.



The Human Torch costume was a hit.



Know a good builder?

Back in the day



MICROPROSE GRAND PRIX

By David Brown

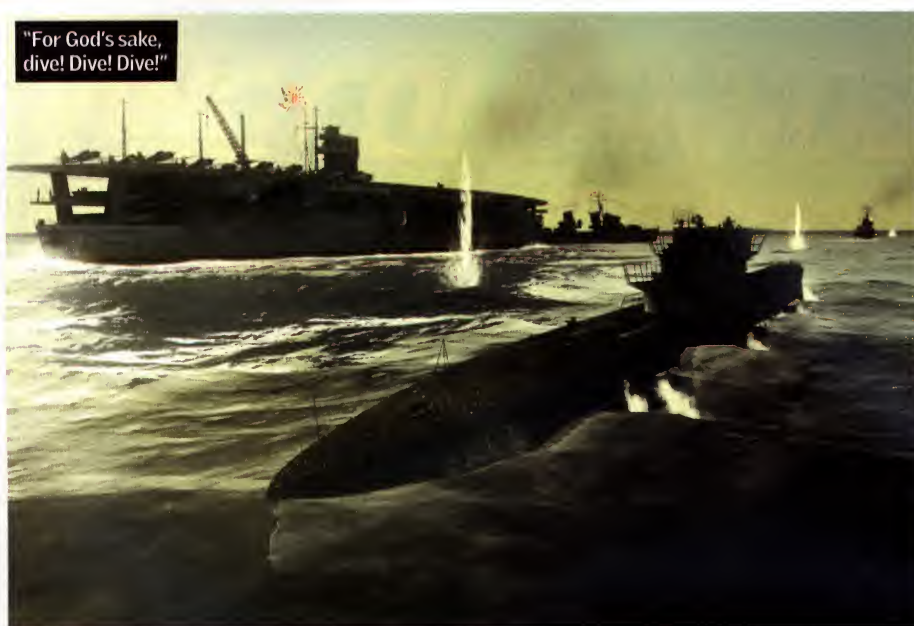
I'VE BEEN PLAYING a lot of racing games recently, but I don't think I've ever had as much fun as I had with *Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix*. Pick any of them – one to four – they're all good.

Granted, some had more bugs and competition than others, but they were all built on the same foundation: using the A, Z, < and > keys to steer your car. No, wait, I meant great gameplay and fun racing. Certainly more fun than the modern F1 is on TV. In fact, have you noticed how they're calling it the "world's greatest car chase" now? I suppose it's too much of a swizz to call it a race nowadays.

If you want some quality F1 racing, dig out *Geoff Crammond* and see how it used to be done. Shame Microprose died off, they made some damn fine titles.

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



SILENT HUNTER 4

Submarining: *Nick Brakespear*

TASKED WITH SNEAKING into a Japanese harbour and photographing the ships docked therein, I give the order to dive and rig for silent running. We're deep in enemy waters with Japanese aircraft and warships crisscrossing above us. I can hear them on the hydrophone: the deep, muted, rhythmic thumping of huge engines all around.

As we near the harbour, as battery power wanes and the shallows approach, we surface to periscope depth and I take a look around. My timing couldn't have been worse:

a destroyer bearing down, unwittingly about to ram us at full speed. Swearing loudly, we dive once again, though the panicked submersion appears to have drawn attention and a single sound fills me with dread: ping.

Like the motion tracker in *Aliens*, the heartbeat-mimicking sonar becomes the rhythm of my fear. Another ping, and another, closer, faster. The destroyer knows we're here, and it's looking for us, and others on the surface have joined the search. The hydrophone roars with the sound of four destroyers as they enter a search pattern, circling

above like the sharks we were meant to be. And then comes the rumbling of large barrel-like objects crashing into the water and sinking towards us. I swear, loudly, as the depth charges explode, though we narrowly avoid any damage. For lack of a better idea, I make for the harbour, rising again to periscope depth for fear of tearing my keel apart on the rocks below.

The destroyers chase after us, charging towards us and, laughably, straight into the harbour. Two of them slow in time, but the other two keep on going, scraping past us with a metallic shriek, and slowly but surely ramming headfirst into the docks.

"Yeah bitches!" I shout at my foes. Sean Connery would be proud.

VERDICT: Dive Dive Revolution!

"The heartbeat-mimicking sonar becomes the rhythm of my fear. Another ping"



FAR CRY 2

Malarial killer: **Richard Cosgrove**

THERE ARE A few games that I've got a love-hate relationship with. *Far Cry* is one. I loved how punishingly hard it was, but that was also the reason I disliked it. Now I've been wanting to play *Far Cry 2* since I first read about it, but it's only recently that I've managed to get a machine that's capable of running it.

Within a few minutes of leaving the tutorial the feeling of loathing affection the original gave me returned. And was quickly replaced with plain irritation. This was down to two things: stealth jeeps and invisible gunmen.

I'd heard talk of how everyone in *Far Cry 2*'s world was determined to end your life, but didn't think it could've been that bad. That was until the fifth time my vehicle was shot up by M60-equipped jeeps. *Far Cry 2* is a challenging FPS, so I expected this type of thing to happen. What I didn't expect were enemy vehicles to sneak up behind me, that had apparently come down a single-lane road I'd just driven on and knew to be empty.

The second irritant were the bad guys. Not only were their gunshots unvaryingly accurate, they were impossible to see, blending into the background with the efficiency of a Predator.

I acknowledge that *Fry Cry 2* is a great game. But it's not one for me: I like games to entertain me, not drive me to punch walls in frustration.

VERDICT: Too tough.

"Bad guys were impossible to see, blending into the background with the efficiency of a Predator!"

There are 20 guards in that screenshot. Can you spot them?

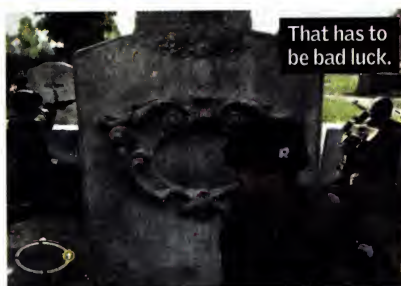
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Hedges, hedges, hedges: **David Brown**

I DON'T KNOW what it is about them, but I just can't get on with the *Brothers in Arms* games. I should like them, ignoring any ingrained hatred of the constant stream of World War II games that have been piled on top of me over the years. I just don't though.

I get bored hiding behind cover for arbitrary reasons. I get bored of whittling down a 'scare-o-metre' over some Nazi's head, before walking round the side and shooting him. I just think it's all a bit forced, a bit, as I said, arbitrary.

However, aren't games like *Call of Duty* just as arbitrary, just in different ways? I mean, they're intensely funnelled, linear shooters that don't make their own nailed-on "you must do this" mechanics as blatantly signposted. Yet they're so, so, so much more fun than *Brothers in Arms* and it's brethren. It does seem to be one of those games that tastes of Marmite. Or maybe Bovril. Either way, it's got that beefy taste that I don't



want in my gaming spread. It just leaves me bitter when I could be enjoying the sweeter taste of *Call of Duty*. Or even just go back to the nostalgic days of chunky *Medal of Honor* peanut butter, or the jammy texture of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. We'll finish off this analogy by simply stating *Brothers in Arms* is Marmite, while *Call of Duty* is Nutella.

VERDICT: Too beefy

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

WOLFENSTEIN

So I bought *Wolfenstein* without reading any reviews. What a mistake to make. If they had borrowed any more ideas from other games they could have taken six months off and watched daytime TV and eat pizzas for breakfast dinner and tea.

Gameplay-wise it's not too bad, but I'm halfway through on hard and, well it's not really hard. Think twice or wait for the sages at the ZONE to review it. [See page 70 - Ed]

Daftvader

DEAD SPACE

Isaac Clarke I salute you in the dismemberment of the necromorphs on the USG Ishimura. An overlooked awesome game with innovative game features, great gameplay. Pant shittingly good.

Mad_AI

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

Pass the spittoon, *David Brown's* been chewing tobacco

THERE HAVE BEEN few games in recent years that have divided opinion so decisively as the original *Call of Juarez*. One thing all who played it agreed on was that the decision to include a Bible-wielding, dual pistols-sporting religious zealot with a righteous cause was inspired. And so Techland put him, Ray McCall, in the prequel, *Bound in Blood*. Sadly without a Bible this time.

But McCall's lack of religiosity didn't matter that much, as the game turned out to be excellent, sanding down some of the rough edges and doing away with irritating young adults, long-winded mountain climbing sequences and box puzzles.

We spoke to Pawel Kopinski about how brothers Ray and Thomas McCall and their friends and enemies all came to be born.



01 HOME IMPROVEMENT

"We consider *Bound in Blood* to be an improvement in every respect over its predecessor. It's bigger, much more advanced from a technical point of view and runs great on all three platforms. Maps are larger and more diverse, with more varied gameplay. There are also many additions we're very happy with: the new gun duels, control schemes and the cover system contribute to the mood, feel and pace of the game.

"All that doesn't make us any less proud of the original *Call of Juarez*, though. We managed to create one of the more memorable protagonists in FPS games in Brother Ray, and we got excellent marks for graphics, voice acting and story.

"We definitely learned a lot during its development, and will always remember it as our first foray into the world of multi-platform production."

02 BROTHERS GRIM

"Each brother posed an entirely different sort of challenge. Ray was an established and fully developed character in the original game and we had to show the way which led him there. Thomas, on the other hand, was an entirely new factor, as his role in the first *Call of Juarez* was mostly revealed through Ray's tale about his brother.

"In *Bound in Blood* we needed to make him a credible catalyst for important events in the storyline, and an enjoyable yet entirely different companion for Ray.

"While being uncompromising gunslingers, both characters play differently and narrate their story from slightly varying points of view, which was our goal from the beginning. Some people prefer Ray's toughness and explosive temper while others see the appeal of Thomas and his indirect approach. Giving players this choice was as important as making the McCall duo feel right from the storyline perspective."



"Each brother posed an entirely different sort of challenge"

"Fancy footstepping won't help you, pardner."

Ain't the bullet, it's the fall that'll kill you.

03 EMBARRASSING IDEAS

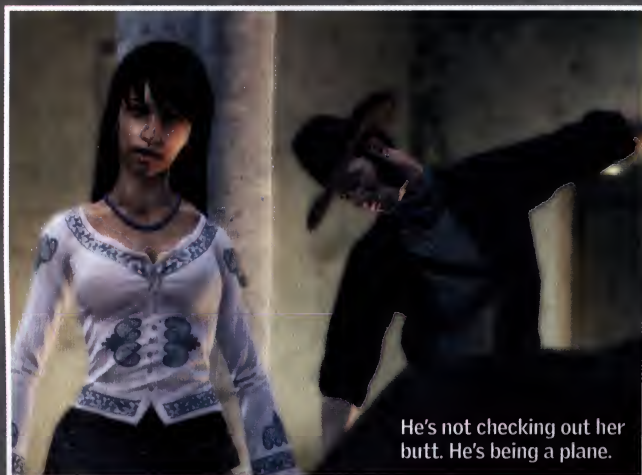
"There are all sorts of things which pop up during brainstorming sessions and design discussions. This usually happens early on but new features and functionality can be added at any stage. The cover system is an example of something which was implemented late in the development process. We toyed with an idea of using the lasso as a weapon, capturing enemies and dragging them behind a horse. Thrown tomahawks were also brought up as an idea.

"The truth is that looking through the finished product, some of the early suggestions look a bit embarrassing. While they're an essential part of the creative process, developers don't necessarily want to talk about them in detail."

04 STORYBOARD CITY

"Knowing the story of the original *Call of Juarez*, anyone could have predicted at least a part of *Bound in Blood*'s ending. Indeed, it was always the way our writers plan, and many of the little clues in the first *COJ* are proof of that. We weren't planning for a prequel outright but the story of the important characters was designed back in 2006.

"Of course there was still a lot of work to do for *Bound in Blood*, we had to fill in the details, choose specific locations, dialogue and design new characters but the key events were already there. This is our approach to story in games: the characters have to make sense when they first appear on screen. Their motivations and background must 'click' with the idea for the game."



He's not checking out her butt. He's being a plane.



Riding off into the... smog apparently.

05 CO-OP QUESTIONS

"It was a tough decision not to include campaign co-op, primarily influenced by a couple of important factors. First of all, we knew from the beginning that the McCall brothers would gradually turn against each other. This growing conflict, not a cheerful camaraderie, is really the focus of the story.

"Secondly, the production schedule was very tight. We might have set some records for a project of this level of quality and scope. Some features were just too resource-intensive to fit in. It's always difficult to pick one thing over the other, but the positive critical reception and feedback from the community prove that *Bound in Blood* is a game well worth the gamers' time."

"Compare *Call of Duty* to *Call of Juarez*? That's utterly ridiculous!"

06 BOWS AND ARROWS

"Compare *Call of Duty* to *Call of Juarez*? That's utterly ridiculous! We may have bows but we don't have nightvision or Middle Eastern dictators! Every game represents a chapter in the history of videogames and the *Call of Duty* series is one of the more important ones. We never endeavoured to mimic it, but seeing *Call of Juarez* in such company is a compliment. *Bound in Blood* has enough character and unique mood and feel that it can be defined without resorting to other games.

"By the way, bows are certainly fun to use in single and multiplayer, but there's a ton of other cool Western weapons in the game, including hybrid revolvers and Gatling guns."



"Elaine! Elaine!"

07 CERTAIN ISSUES

At the start of the development process we gathered all the feedback we could find regarding the first *COJ*. From the top of the list of things players liked the most we had to pick a finite number of features to leave us room for new ones. Mountain climbing just didn't make it. After all, there's a ton of other fun things to do in *Bound in Blood*. Just no mountain climbing. Or Billy.

Only later did the McCalls learn they'd burst into the wrong room.

08 ROAMING FREE

"We never really considered making the whole thing free-roaming like *Oblivion* or that sort of thing. We had a great story to tell and we wanted to focus on it. More control over the player's path also means a more controlled pace (which is a fancy way of saying 'non-stop action')."

"To offset this a bit, our maps are much more open-ended and spacious than in other linear first-person shooters, giving players some breathing room and the opportunity to admire all the natural environments where our Chrome Engine 4 can really shine."

Press 'ESC' to skip this cutscene

What happens when your gun gets stuck.

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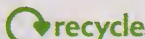
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All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change.
PC ZONE is a little mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

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PCZONE

113

Kane 1



Kane 2



Kane 3



Kane 4



Kane 5



Kane 6



Kane 7



KrAZee KANE KONTINUED

You can probably tell, having read our interview with Joe 'Kane' Kucan on page 22, that he's a funny guy. A funny, tremendously hard to interview guy. Here's what was left on the cutting room floor after that exchange, an array of Kucan-grade nonsense deemed unprintable by our production editor.

KANE ON...

THE COMMAND & CONQUER 4 TEASER TRAILER

Mid-interview, Joe 'Kane' Kucan stops and points at one of the room's TVs, which are playing the Command & Conquer 4 trailer on repeat.

Kane 1

KANE: Wait a second, I'm on TV. Hold on, I'll be on soon.

Kane 2

KANE: Not me yet, no no, those are my feet, those are my feet there.

Kane 3

KANE: Oh there's some guys talking about me because I'm coming.

Kane 4

KANE: Oh there I am. Oh is that me? It's hard to tell because I've got the hood up. Oh who's the guy under the hood?

Kane 5

KANE: There's something on my nose there. God I got a big-ass nose don't I? You can tell me Steve, I know I got a big nose.

Kane 6

KANE: Oh and who's that? Oh, and the door's are opening, who could it be? Who could it be!? Oh is it!? Is it!? Maybe if he took his hood off then we'd know. Hey for God'sakes take the hood off! Who is it?

Kane 7

KANE: Who could it be? Oh I'm too excited! Oh he's gonna do it!

Kane 8

KANE: Oooh, it's me under the hood!

STEVE: How did it feel, taking off the hood?

KANE: Cool. The hood was really, really warm, and the room was air-conditioned so I took the hood off and there was a nice breeze that caught me on the back of the neck.

KANE ON...

SAUSAGES

STEVE: Concerning your Wikipedia entry, I did some research...

KANE: Ha, you did some research? You went to Wikipedia and spelt my name right, that's what passes for research these days?

STEVE: Well it's not your personal Wikipedia page, it's Kane's, which is 3,000 words long.

KANE: Much longer than my personal one then.

STEVE: I tried to find things that it's longer than. It's longer than the entry on bratwurst...

KANE: (laughs) I'm sorry, I have to ask you something. How did you come up with bratwurst? Of all the things that it could be longer than: bratwurst? Seriously?

STEVE: It was pretty early in the morning.

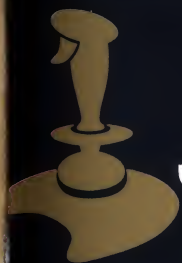
KANE: Alright so yeah, here's a big fuck you to bratwurst.

STEVE: So do you think that Kane is more culturally relevant than bratwurst?

KANE: Well, I can't take any responsibility for Wikipedia, because obviously the world decides what is more important. So I cannot claim that Kane is more important, but apparently the world has spoken.

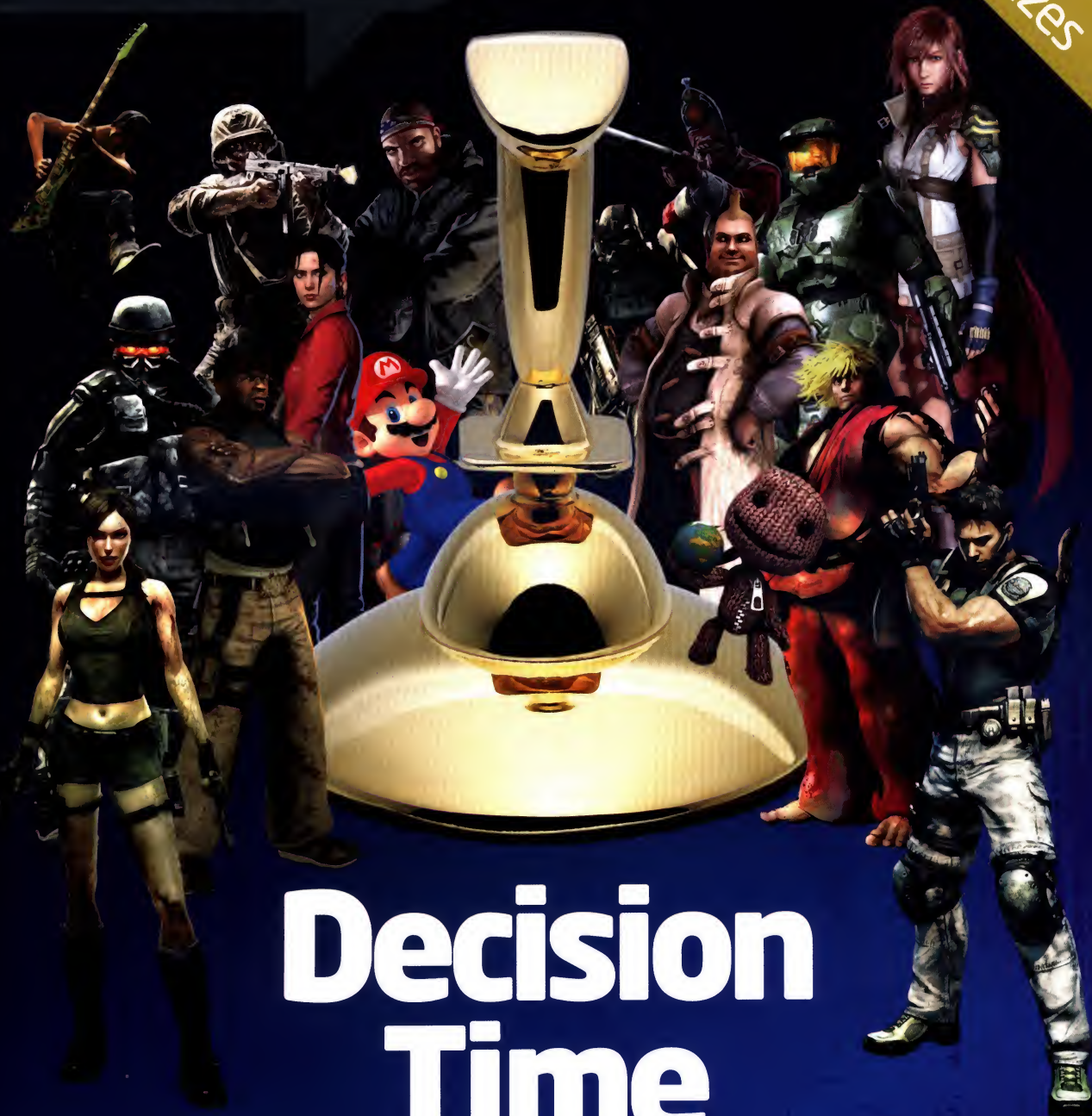
STEVE: So closing thoughts. How do you see Kane progressing?

KANE: Soon I plan for Kane to be bigger. And not just bigger than bratwurst. I'd like to see Kane expand his global role so that he's bigger than wieners - you know hot dogs, American hot dogs - and I plan to take over sausage. All sausage. I'd like to eclipse sausage. Fair warning to sausage, I'm going to take them down.



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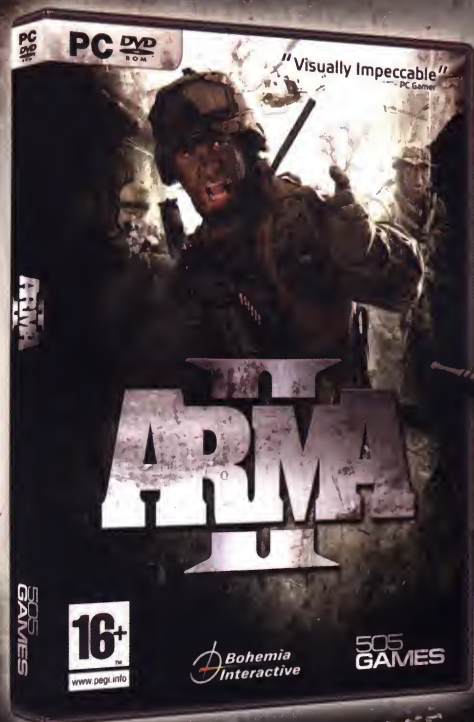
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